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# THE NEW YORKER





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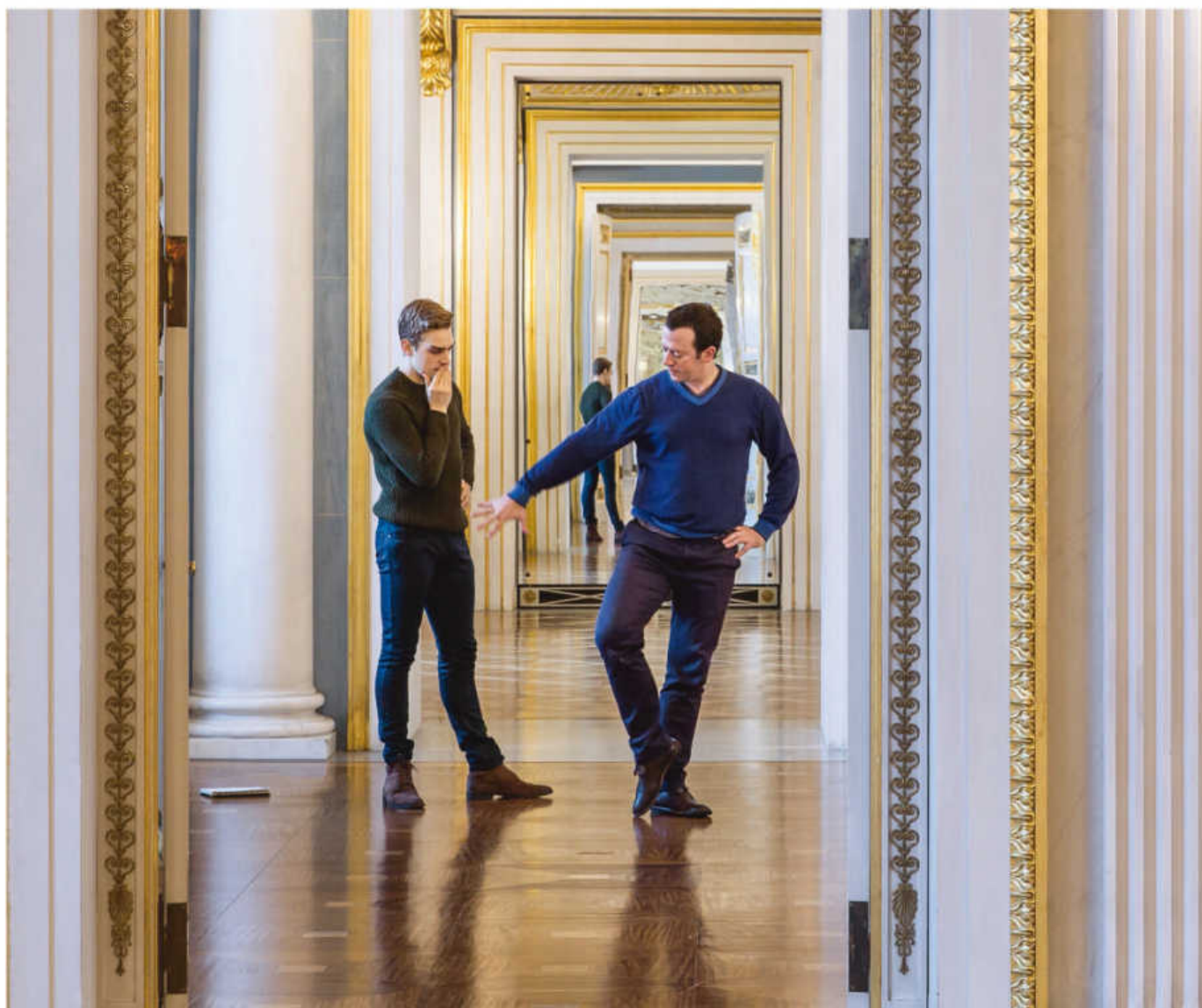
# THE NEW YORKER

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**CHRIS WARE** (COVER) is the author of the graphic novels “Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth” and “Building Stories.” An animation based on the cover, co-produced by *The New Yorker* and “This American Life,” can be found at [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com) and in our magazine app. It was created by Chris Ware and John Kuramoto, with interviews and narration by Ira Glass and music by Nico Muhly.

**IAN FRAZIER** (“BRONX DREAMS,” P. 38) has been a contributor since 1974. His book “Hogs Wild: Selected Reporting Pieces” will be published next year.

**EMILY EAKIN** (“BACTERIA ON THE BRAIN,” P. 56), a former senior editor at the magazine, is writing a book about contemporary medical culture.

**RACHEL AVIV** (“THE REFUGEE DILEMMA,” P. 46) has been a staff writer since 2013.

**JHUMPA LAHIRI** (“TEACH YOURSELF ITALIAN,” P. 30) is the author of four books, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning short-story collection “Interpreter of Maladies.” Her fifth book, “In Other Words,” originally written in Italian, will be published in February by Alfred A. Knopf.

**ELIZABETH KOLBERT** (COMMENT, P. 23), a staff writer, won this year’s Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction for “The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History.”

**CLIVE JAMES** (POEM, P. 50) is the author of the poetry collection “Sentenced to Life,” which will be published in the U.S. in January.

**MIKE O'BRIEN** (SHOUTS & MURMURS, P. 37), a former “S.N.L.” writer, recently released a sketch comedy album, “Tasty Radio.”

**ALEX ROSS** (A CRITIC AT LARGE, P. 72), the magazine’s music critic, is the author of two books, “The Rest Is Noise” and “Listen to This.”

**MARTIN AMIS** (FICTION, P. 64) has published fourteen novels, including, most recently, “The Zone of Interest” and “Lionel Asbo: State of England.”

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# THE MAIL

## ROUSEY'S STRENGTH

The other night, I sat alone in my dorm room streaming the Ultimate Fighting Championship and watched Holly Holm best Ronda Rousey, which Kelefa Sanneh wrote about for the Web site ("Ronda Rousey, Routed"). Unlike most eighteen-year-old girls, I have been in martial arts since the age of four. After nearly eleven years of Tae Kwon Do, five years of kickboxing, and the occasional jujitsu and Muay Thai lesson, I knew who Rousey was long before Beyoncé ever sampled her at a concert. I was devastated when I saw her out cold on the floor. Despite her trash talking, despite the tiff at the weigh-in, despite her not having touched Holm's gloves, despite the fact that my fighting style is more similar to Holm's, I was crushed. Holm, a world boxing champ many times over, seems to be great, wholesome, and humble; she exudes sportsmanship and on paper is an ideal athletic role model. But I did not want her to win. Why? She didn't make the breakthroughs that Rousey had. I wanted Rousey to keep going, to keep proving why female athletes deserve the spotlight. I was never celebrated for achieving the same athletic feats as my male counterparts in school. I felt I couldn't be as feminine as I wanted to be because people knew I could knock them out. Now Rousey is a sex symbol, and so much more. I was finally able to sleep, in the wee hours of Sunday morning, because although Rousey won't retire undefeated, no one will be able to take back all that she has done for me and others who relate.

*Quinn Halman  
Montreal, Quebec*

## DIAL-UP DEMOCRACY

Jill Lepore's article touches on a number of topics relating to public-opinion polling, but does not cover enough of the backstory ("Politics and the New Machine," November 16th). The reference to Americans' increasing use of cell phones doesn't mention that most researchers are successfully integrating cell-phone interviews into their sample de-

signs. The critique of the role that polling plays in a representative democracy does not give sufficient credit to public opinion as a matter of philosophic debate. A reader interested in delving into the subject might begin by reading "Polling and Democracy," a report by the American Association for Public Opinion Research's task force on public opinion and leadership. The association is the country's largest and oldest organization for special reports, journal articles, task forces, and conference programs dealing with issues relating to cell-phone interviewing, changing response rates, attitudes, election polling, and non-probability sampling using the Internet.

*Frank Newport  
Editor-in-Chief, Gallup  
Princeton, N.J.*

Lepore describes the committee that, in 1948, was tasked by the Social Science Research Council to investigate "polling's most notorious failure"—the prediction that Dewey would beat Truman. She writes that the resulting report found that the problem was due, in part, to quota sampling, but the committee did not place most of the blame there; it noted that replacing quotas with probability sampling would allow researchers to estimate sampling error. The Mosteller report, as it is called, stated that "the pollsters overreached the capabilities" and "they had been led by false assumptions into believing their methods were much more accurate than in fact they are." The explanation offered by pollsters was that, convinced they knew the outcome, they had stopped polling too early and missed a shift to Truman. That particular mistake won't be made again, but, with respect to the overall conclusions of the report, little has changed.

*Jan Werner  
Pittsfield, Mass.*

*Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.*

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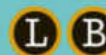
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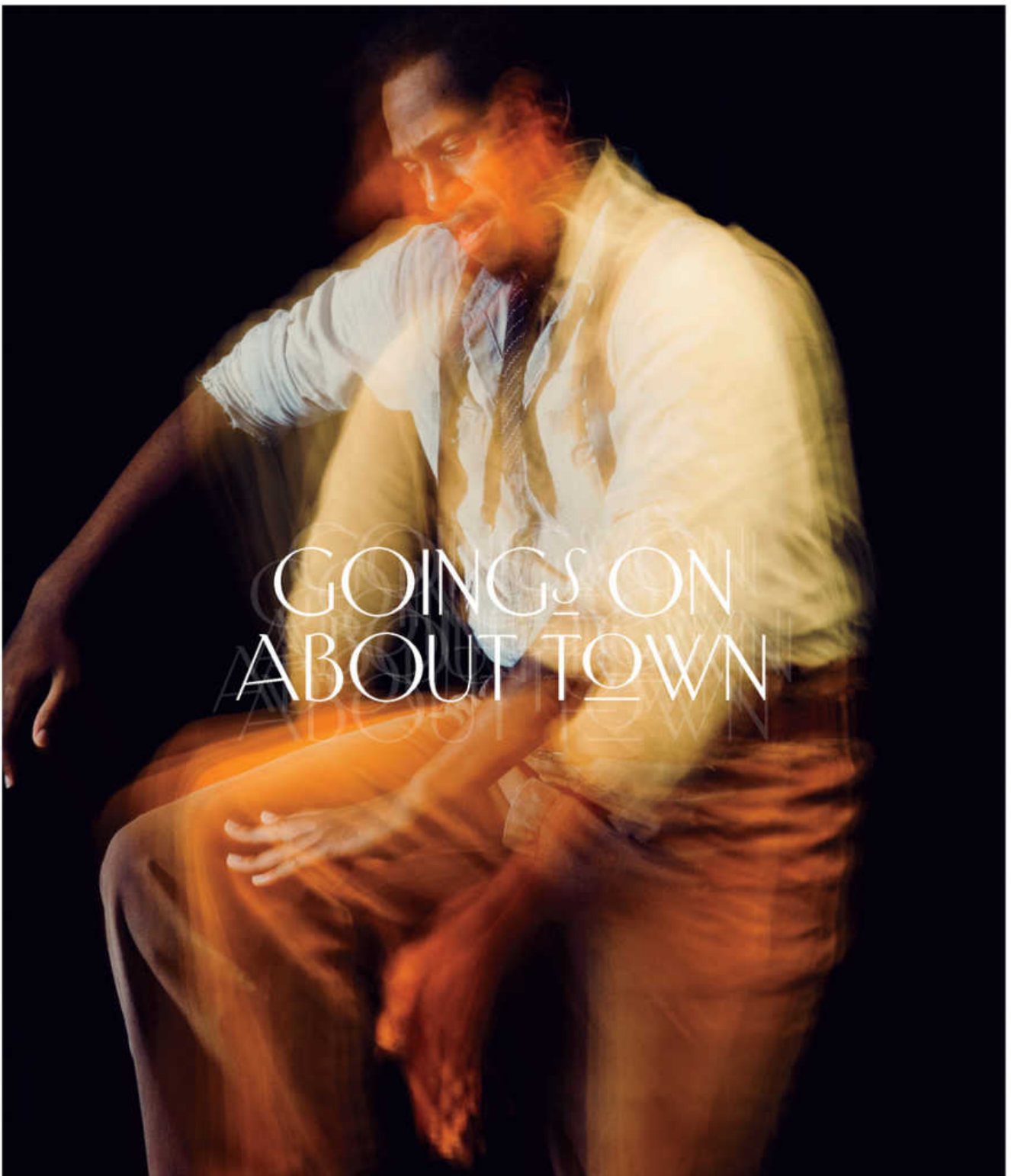
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**THE COMPOSER JULIA WOLFE** has a striking ability to channel three streams of American music—Appalachian vernacular, post-minimalist classical, and rock—into a mighty river. She did so in “Anthracite Fields,” which won the Pulitzer Prize this year, and in “Steel Hammer” (2009), a work that distills the many folklore versions of John Henry—the legendary railroad steel driver who died after winning a contest of strength against a steam-powered hammer—into a compelling, unified image. Scored for three female voices and the Bang on a Can All-Stars, the work has been reinvented as music drama (at BAM’s Harvey Theatre, Dec. 2-6) by the director Anne Bogart; actors from SIT! Company (including Eric Berryman, above) perform new texts by the playwrights Kia Corthron, Will Power, Carl Hancock Rux, and Regina Taylor, interspersed between the songs.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN PFLUGER

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# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Metropolitan Museum

#### "Design for Eternity: Architectural Models from the Ancient Americas"

Before the arrival of European colonizers in the Andes and what is now Mexico, when the wealthy died, they were entombed with small-scale versions of the buildings (houses, temples, ball courts) they passed through while they were alive. More than four dozen of these mysterious objects are here, ranging from a cubiform house made of limestone to a spiralling tower painted with wildcats and studded with reliefs of snails. Many of the models were grafted onto drinking vessels, although

their irregular shapes—some Andean examples have apertures shaped like stirrups, which would be tricky to fill—have led scholars to guess that they were intended to provide spiritual nourishment for the departed, rather than ritual drinks for the living. The showstopper is a model of the courtyard of a pre-Incan palace at Chan Chan, in which wooden figurines swarming with polka dots play music and pour beer, while mummies swaddled in fabric prepare to hit the dance floor. Through Sept. 18.

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Morton Bartlett

The Boston artist, who died in 1992, was a commercial photographer with an unusual hobby. From the mid-nineteen-thirties through the early sixties, he took pictures of uncannily lifelike sculptures of children, which he painstakingly fashioned from plaster, then painted and dressed. (On occasion, he undressed them, too.) There's a selection of those unsettling photographs here, alongside some of Bartlett's wholesomely bland snapshots of real children, usually girls, seen outdoors—skiing, boating, picking wildflowers—which pale in comparison. Through Dec. 12. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

### Carroll Dunham

Bodies at rest and in motion—sune men, busy women, all of them nude—star in the new work of one of America's most vital painters. The men are portrayed as if seen from their own perspective. We don't see their faces, only their flesh, from nipples to phallus to feet—the male gaze caught navel-gazing. Women, by contrast, swing from trees (Jane is her own Tarzan) and head out on horseback. It's absurd to distinguish between figurative and abstract in Dunham's pictures, and the same goes for painting and drawing: the brush and the pencil are interdependent. That said, a room lined with preparatory drawings steals the show. Through Dec. 4. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

### Kota Ezawa

In the notorious 1990 heist at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Manet were looted. In his new animated video, the German-born, San Francisco-based artist transforms five minutes or so of security-camera footage from the night before the robbery (the F.B.I. released it this summer) into a deadpan cartoon. Shadowy figures flit past the security desk to a car parked just outside. But the new clues brought us no closer

to the missing objects, thirteen in total, which are seen, actual size, in paint-by-numbers-like renditions on glowing light boxes—surrogates for every art work that has disappeared into private hands. Through Dec. 19. (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.)

### Ralph Lemon

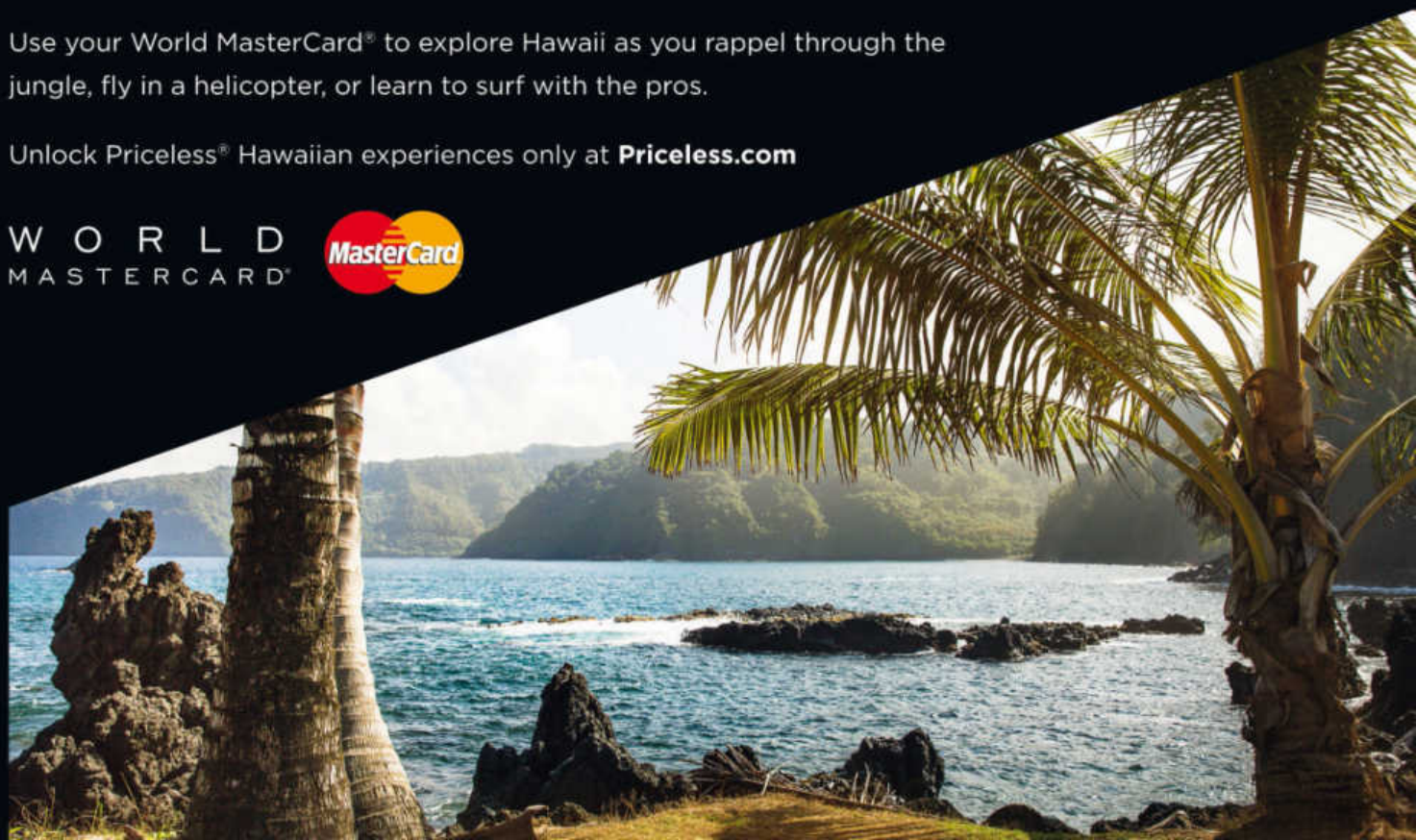
Forty years into his career, the American artist is having a moment. In the past few weeks alone, the poet Anne Carson (who shares his Delphic intensity) wrote a "Ralphabet" in Lemon's honor, and he was short-listed for a prize at the Guggenheim. "Scaffold Room," an exhibition of photographs, intricate drawings, neon sculptures, videos, and found wooden figures (two dressed as Jay-Z and Beyoncé), is a pendant to Lemon's recent performance piece of the same name, a searing rumination on power dynamics with monologues, singing, and dancing—and one unendurable scream. The live work's electricity, provocation, and wide net of references (from Moms Mabley and Kathy Acker to Ben Webster and Biggie Smalls) are unmatched by this disjointed show. But it does have its strange pleasures, notably three videos shot in the Mississippi Delta. Dogs bark in silver suits, boys dress as giraffes, and four elderly,

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For his ecstatic new series "Choreograph," the conceptual American photographer James Welling worked with dance companies from New York to Los Angeles. The pictures are on view at the Zwirner gallery through Jan. 16.

dignified men and women tend the garden of an Afrofuturist satellite. (To dive deep into Lemon's concerns, see the upcoming book "On Value," published by *Triple Canopy*.) Through Dec. 5. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

#### Sopheap Pich

Born in 1971, in Cambodia, Pich fled the Khmer Rouge for America, where he studied at the Art Institute of Chicago before returning home, in 2002. Here, wall-mounted rattan dowels form lattices that evoke incarceration; an oversized model of a flowering plant is installed upside down, its petals and stems made of the same fragile caning. Pich's works are freighted with the atrocities of Cambodian history, but they're also daringly quiet. The best of them recall the work of another diffident master, the American sculptor Martin Puryear. Through Dec. 19. (Rollins, 529 W. 20th St. 212-229-9100.)

#### Ian Ruhter

The California photographer makes his New York debut with a handsome series of big Western landscapes, paying homage to such nineteenth-century masters of the genre as Carleton Watkins and Eadweard Muybridge (and sometimes shooting from the same vantage points). Ruhter also nods to the director John Ford with views of Monument Valley, Yosemite Falls, and the snow-capped Sierras. His use of the laborious, accident-prone wet-plate collodion process gives his subtly toned black-and-white prints a lovely mutability, as clarity slips into shimmering, soft-focus passages. Through Dec. 19. (Danziger, 527 W. 23rd St. 212-629-6778.)

#### Alexis Smith

Though she rose to prominence alongside her fellow Los Angeles ironists Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein, this is the first New York show in eleven years of Smith's mordant assemblages. Chief among her themes is the gap between the promise of the American Dream and its reality, which she dramatizes through juxtaposition. An album cover in which Elvis sports a ballpoint mustache is collaged onto a photograph of riflemen in balaclavas. A wig, in the style a delegate might have worn to the Continental Congress, shares a frame with a caustic quote from "Dr. Strangelove" about the American military: "I don't say we wouldn't get our hair mussed, but I do say no more than ten or twenty million people killed." Through Dec. 5. (Greenan, 529 W. 20th St. 212-929-1351.)

#### GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

##### Ryan Mrozowski

A sly mind is at play in acrylic paintings, oil-stick drawings, and a work made of inlaid wood by the young American artist. Mrozowski's main subjects are fruits and flowers, often seen on paired canvases that ring changes on the same image. Leaves and, say, cherries that are detailed in one version are blanked out in its companion. In the wood piece, off-white polka dots pepper a sheet of plywood stained black. The array is slightly irregular, suggesting an image of wrinkled cloth. Mrozowski stirs our curiosity about what we see, then abandons us to wonder. The effect is a ceaseless perceptual stutter. Through Dec. 13. (On Stellar Rays, 1 Rivington St. 212-598-3012.)

#### Christopher Rodriguez

The new color series by this New Orleans-born, Brooklyn-based photographer brings an open-ended approach to a classic documentary subject: being on the road. The pictures are full of feeling, yet unsentimental; Rodriguez tempers warmth with just the right degree of cool. The friends and family Rodriguez travelled with are rarely seen head-on; his attention is more absorbed by in-between moments: a baby bird, a tarp blowing off a parked pickup, a shell-flecked boulder. In the show's standout image, a distant forest fire turns the sky blazing pink above a winding California river. Through Dec. 19. (Wolf, 70 Orchard St. 212-925-0025.)

#### "A Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World"

This small five-artist show lands a concussive punch. The title is from a tale by the brilliant seventeenth-century philosopher Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne—a proto-feminist, scandalous as such in her time, and often deemed the inventor of science fiction. It concerns an intellectually advanced land ruled by an empress. In keeping with its icy delirium is Cajs von Zeppel's big white statue of two semi-nude girls, one looking blissful while riding piggyback on the other, who appears alarmed. How does Anna Uddenberg's life-size woman in chic sportswear, trying, impossibly, to get into a baby stroller, relate? Unclear, but it works. So do less strident but equally enigmatic pieces by Magalie Comeau, Tillman Kaiser, and Betty Tomkins, which emanate, like everything here, a cosmic, more or less lethal, intelligence. Through Dec. 13. (Albus, 132 Delancey St. 212-844-0074.)

#### MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

##### METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Jacqueline de Ribes: The Art of Style." Through Feb. 21.

##### MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Walid Raad." Through Jan. 31.

##### MOMA PSI

"Greater New York." Through March 7.

##### GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Photo-Poetics: An Anthology." Through March 23.

##### THE WHITNEY MUSEUM

"Frank Stella: A Retrospective." Through Feb. 7.

##### BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861-2008." Through March 13.

##### BRONX MUSEUM

"Martin Wong: Human Instamatic." Through Feb. 14.

##### MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

"Ebony G. Patterson: Dead Treez." Through April 3.

##### MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

"Martin Puryear: Multiple Dimensions." Through Jan. 10.

#### GALLERIES SHORT LIST

##### UPTOWN

###### Julie Ault

Galerie Buchholz  
17 E. 82nd St. 646-964-4276.  
Through Jan. 16.

###### Francis Bacon

Gagosian  
980 Madison Ave., at 76th St.  
212-744-2313.  
Through Dec. 12.

###### Pierre Klossowski

Gladstone  
130 E. 64th St. 212-753-2200.  
Through Dec. 19.

##### DOWNTOWN

###### Cynthia Daignault

Cooley  
107 Norfolk St. 212-680-0564.  
Through Dec. 20.

###### Steve Di Benedetto, James

Siena, Leo Villareal  
The National Exemplar  
381 Broadway, at White St.  
thenationalexemplargallery.com.  
Opens Dec. 3.

###### John Russell

Donahue  
99 Bowery. 646-896-1368.  
Through Jan. 10.

##### BROOKLYN

###### Sebastian Black

Clearing  
396 Johnson Ave., Bushwick.  
718-456-0396.  
Through Jan. 10.

###### Ragnheidur Gestsdóttir,

Theresa Himmer, Emily Weiner  
Soloway  
348 S. 4th St., Williamsburg.  
347-776-1023.  
Through Dec. 20.

###### Jessica Stockholder

Cleopatra's  
110 Meserole Ave., Greenpoint.  
cleopatras.us.  
Through Dec. 21.



# DANCE



## HE'S SORRY

*The Guggenheim's "Peter & the Wolf."*

WHEN THE GUGGENHEIM'S "Works & Process" series premiered its version of Prokofiev's "Peter & the Wolf," in 2007, the only person on the stage was the show's narrator, Isaac Mizrahi. No one else, it seemed, was needed. How many voices Mizrahi had! While the orchestra tweeted and tooted and blatted, to represent the different characters—"Peter," lovely show that it is, is also a pedagogical tool, aimed at teaching children the sounds of the different instruments—Mizrahi did something similar: jaunty voice for brave Peter, creepy voice for the Wolf, Flatbush voice for Grandfather, and so on.

Two years ago, when Mizrahi took over as director, dancing was added, by John Heginbotham, and the piece became even more charming. Peter (Macy Sullivan), Little Boy personified, hurls himself around; the Bird (Elizabeth Coker) goes pick-pick-picking along; the Duck (Marjorie Folkman) waddles forth, takes a mimed bath, and argues with the Bird about which of them is the better sort of fowl. But wait! Who is that fellow on the park bench with a tail the size of a yoga pillow? Oh no! The Wolf!

The costumes, designed by Mizrahi, a couturier by trade, are sheer heaven. Peter has a beanie with a pinwheel on top; the Bird wears what appears to be high-top sneakers adapted for pointe work; the Duck, my favorite, wears a corny little cardigan over a white tutu skirt. The Grandfather, played by the modern-dance veteran Gus Solomons, Jr., wears a Kelly-green Shriner's fez.

The choreography is simple and repetitive, as it should be, in order to convey its musical lessons. The musicians—from Ensemble Signal, under the baton of Brad Lubman—have been moved up to the stage so that the children in the audience don't just hear the instruments; they also see them. The Wolf gets captured, of course, and he is led away. He looks sorry for what he did. This year, there are ten performances, two per day Dec. 5-6 and Dec. 11-13. Book fast. This is a popular show.

—Joan Acocella

### Souleymane Badolo / "Yimbégré"

Born in Burkina Faso and a resident of Brooklyn since 2009, Badolo is a compelling physical presence, with exquisite control and a wounded gaze that gets under your skin. His new piece, which explores the loss that comes with new beginnings—a subject close to Badolo's heart—is entitled "Yimbégré," a word that means "beginning" in the Burkina Fasian language Mooré. Badolo is joined by the dancer Sylvestre Koffitse Akakapo-Adzaku and accompanied by the drummer Mamoudou Konate. (BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 2-5.)

### Pavel Zúštiak and Palissimo Company

"Custodians of Beauty," a new piece by this Czech-born choreographer, focusses on the idea of beauty, corporeal and beyond. The lighting designer Joe Levasseur and the composer Christian Frederickson—responsible, along with Zúštiak's often arresting imagery, for much of the beauty in previous Zúštiak pieces—collaborate with him again. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 2-5.)

### Tere O'Connor

"The Goodbye Studies" is an ensemble work for a dozen dancers, a mix of familiar faces and fresh ones. In it, you might find images, timely and timeless, of people suffering and protesting their condition. But no meanings are ever fixed in O'Connor's choreography; gradually or abruptly, something is always becoming something else, veering down a different associative path. Say goodbye to dance as narrative or music visualization. Say hello to choreography that dramatically and beguilingly resists and eludes comprehension. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Dec. 2-5 and Dec. 8. Through Dec. 12.)

### Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

Since taking over as artistic director, in 2011, Robert Battle has revamped the repertory, mostly in beneficial ways. These haven't involved new choreography by him until now. His "Awakening," a typically ritualistic affair set to a John Mackey score, débuts during the first of the company's five weeks at City Center. The hip-hop testifying of Renée Harris's "Exodus" is also in the starting lineup, as is the premiere of "Open Door," by Ronald K. Brown, a processional work that richly emphasizes the African elements in recordings by Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 2-6 and Dec. 8. Through Jan. 3.)

### Gallim Dance

"Whale," Andrea Miller's latest dance, addresses the tensions involved in love, sex, and home life. Those are dauntingly adult themes for a choreographer whose prior work has seemed stuck in an immature stage, vigorously imitating the contorted eccentricities of Ohad Naharin. Here, her hyper-agile dancers move to live music by Jared Chiolis. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 3-6.)

### Sasha Waltz / "Continu"

The evening, an amalgamation of two works created by the German contemporary-dance choreographer Waltz for museum spaces in 2009, begins with a handful of dancers moving in sinuous patterns to the accompaniment of a percussionist (playing a score by Xenakis), and builds into a musical maelstrom. As Edgar Varèse's "Arcana" swirls around them, the dancers fill the stage with frenzied movement: running, bending, jumping, or marking the floor with their paint-smeared feet. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 4-5.)

ILLUSTRATION BY STACEY ROZICH



Lester Holt  
Paris



We go to the story  
so you get the story.

 **NIGHTLY NEWS**  
WITH LESTER HOLT



## ONCE REMOVED

*The members of Dinosaur Jr. find essential noise in the space between them.*

**THE IMPERSONAL ORIGIN STORY OF** Dinosaur Jr. might have foreshadowed the band's icy tenure. In 1984, Joseph (J) Mascis, Jr., responded to a flyer he saw at Main Street Records, in Northampton, Massachusetts, looking for players for a new punk band. Deep Wound, as the outfit was called, disbanded that same year, and Mascis poached the drummer Emmett Jefferson (Murph) Murphy III and the bassist Lou Barlow for a noisy, minimal rock trio called Dinosaur.

Dinosaur's formative era brimmed with heavy, emotive rock—Sonic Youth, the Cure, the Meat Puppets—and the recent high-school graduates were eager to ape their heroes. These influences show up across their self-titled debut album, released in 1985 to almost no fanfare. But it was Mascis's experimentation that stood out: he strung together various pedals and amps to give his guitar a muddy wail, and, nearly a decade ahead of grunge's North American ascendance, the record writhed with the kind of low-slung stacked riffs and cantankerous vocals that by 1991 would make a star of a kid from Aberdeen, Washington, named Kurt. "The world drips down like gravy / the thoughts of love so hazy," Mascis sings on "Repulsion," the college-radio killer that bursts out at dead center from a track list of otherwise middling hardcore and folk. Their original blend of sounds may have been the result of home-studio exhibitionism and guileless youth, but with the successful follow-ups "You're Living All Over Me" and "Bug," Dinosaur Jr. (renamed after a lawsuit following their second album) nodded toward disparate strands of rock, from grunge to noise, across formats and radio dials.

Yes, Dinosaur Jr. broke up. Many bands do. By 2005, nearly a decade after Barlow and Mascis's frequent standoffs boiled over and split the band (tasking Murphy with years of mediation), the trio reunited for a series of shows and, in 2007, released "Beyond," the first of several new records. They don't enjoy the nostalgic adoration many of their peers do, and their sound has long since receded from its peak commercial relevance. But there is a certain pragmatism to Dinosaur Jr.'s reunion: a sense that the three men have recognized that their gift and their bond are bigger than their individual interests, a rare level of self-understanding. For a week at Bowery Ballroom, starting Dec. 3, they'll revisit "Dinosaur," performing the entire record in celebration of the album's thirty-year anniversary. They are not best friends, or brothers—Mascis has described them as something closer to "distant cousins"—but, once again, they're bandmates.

—Matthew Trammell

## ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.*

### Car Seat Headrest

In the song "Something Soon," the singer-songwriter Will Toledo plots to kick his father in the shins, and shortly after admits that he can't talk to his folks. It's a shame, as a conversation might prove fruitful: Toledo employs words so effectively across the material he records as Car Seat Headrest that one imagines a simple talk might eliminate the need for interfamilial violence. He has self-released hours of muted, needling indie-rock songs, and betrays a shameless affection for sunny sixties pop—on "No Passion," one of the bedroom demos repackaged by the covetable label Matador on this fall's "Teens of Style" album, the rays bleed through an overcast of monotone and reverb. (Baby's All Right, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. Dec. 5.)

### Kid Cudi

Before the worlds of hip-hop and electronic music intermingled without friction, this young rapper from Cleveland carved new space with self-released singles and mixtapes that were atypical both in sound (melodic, sparse, downtrodden) and circumstance (he was catalyzed by music blogs and social media and unconcerned with traditional music outlets). Cudi's way around a refrain and his fearless, if unkempt, experimentation with dance music, and later rock, gained the artist a cult of college-age fans and an apprenticeship with Kanye West during the recording of West's pivotal "808s & Heartbreak." Cudi has remained disruptive, shunning the spotlight and releasing increasingly unpredictable long-plays. His forthcoming album, "Speedin' Bullet 2 Heaven," promises to be equally surprising. (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Dec. 6.)

### Duck Down Music 20 Year Anniversary

This under-heralded fixture in New York City's independent-music legacy is no doubt less flashy than Def Jam or Tommy Boy, but it boasts eight million stories nonetheless. Duck Down Music started in the mid-nineties as a recoil from rap's first wave of excess and commercialism, and became an institution for a corner of uncompromising rap conservatives who preferred the genre's scrappy, insular origins to its more broadly accessible iterations. The radio personalities Peter Rosenberg and Cippa Sounds will help Duck Down's esteemed founders and flagship acts (**Buckshot**, **Smiff N Wessun**, **Pharoahe Monch**) recount two decades of label history through interviews and performances. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Dec. 3.)



### Landlady

This art-rock quintet has invited actors, comedians, and fellow-musicians to its Second Annual Holiday Spectacular, a variety show with a sprawling lineup and a charitable agenda. For its final performance of 2015, Landlady performs the album "Upright Behavior," plugged by Wilco as one of the best releases of the year. Wilco's own **Nels Cline** performs, as well as **Eli Paperboy Reed**, before the creators of the Web series "Good Cop Great Cop," **Matt Porter** and **Charlie Hankin**, rally for laughs. Landlady will also debut its original holiday production, "Red Velvet: An Ill-Conceived Santa Story," narrated by **Frank Simms**, of "Saturday Night Live." Proceeds from the evening, which boasts "mandatory snacks," will go to We Make Noise, an organization that offers free and sliding-scale music classes and workshops at the Bushwick School of Music, NYC Rock Camp, and Music's Cool Music School. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Dec. 6.)

### Joanna Newsom

On a recent segment of "Larry King Now," this multifaceted composer gave the eighty-six-year-old host his first harp lesson. "That was beautiful," King exhaled after striking an impressive note. The instrument shares characteristics with Newsom: grand in posture yet saccharine in sound, singular amidst any grouping, beautiful, and just a bit silly. Her modernist folk has enjoyed breathless praise since her earliest recorded work began circulating, in 2003, and this fall Newsom returned from a five-year hiatus with "Divers," rife with fluttering melodies and dense, poetic lyrics. (Kings Theatre, 1027 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn. 718-856-5464. Dec. 7.)

### PC Worship

Rest easy, Bushwick: D.I.Y. is in good hands. Venues are healthily booked, and the most interesting acts are still prolific; this release party encapsulates the best of both. PC Worship, the experimental project of Justin Frye, just weeks ago released its "Basement Hysteria" EP, four truly extended tracks of ripping noise and creep-from-behind frequencies. The particularly unhinged solos on the lead single, "My Lens," conjure images of a decrepit banjo fingered at by Tim Burton-esque appendages. The evening also features an installation by the performance ensemble **Ashcan Orchestra**. (Palisades, 906 Broadway, Brooklyn. palisadesbk.com. Dec. 4.)

### Swim Deep

The word "slacker" is softer and more charming than the people it describes, affording otherwise underachieving third-placers a certain agency in their fate: plopped on the couch or wandering the mall because they so choose, not because they're doomed. That was the prevailing attitude of this Birmingham pop-punk outfit when they first broke, in 2011, and their tunes followed suit: slow-rolling rhythms built on two or three chords with hooks too simple to classify as shrewd. But their "Mothers" LP, released in September, found the group shaken awake with psychedelic embellishments on tracks like "One Great Song and I Could Change the World," a title that sounds nothing if not motivated. (Baby's All Right, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. Dec. 2.)

### Total Freedom

When the unruly menswear label Hood by Air staged its fall runway show in 2014, it tapped this equally subversive d.j. to produce the score. The resulting twenty-four-minute composition, "10,000 Screaming Faggots," wove together soaring Beyoncé samples and poetry by Juliana Huxtable, all laid under silver-bullet drums and synths that claved at warehouse walls. Ashland

Mines, who goes by the name Total Freedom, plays gripping club sets and once hosted a party series in Los Angeles where attendees were strictly forbidden to dance—if anyone broke form, he'd stop playing until the entire room froze again. You'll be permitted to dance during this set at Output, but listen closely either way; opening mixes from the electronic wunderkind **Arca** and the HBA co-founder **Shayne** are sure to bend conventions just as severely. (74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. outputclub.com. Dec. 3.)

### JAZZ AND STANDARDS

#### Tim Berne

Lucky is the jazz bandleader who finds himself signed to a major label yet still able to fully express his artistic vision. The saxophonist and composer Berne is in that enviable position: his three ECM albums with his Snakeoil quartet are as uncompromisingly edgy as anything this dedicated musical experimentalist figure could be expected to produce. The baseless band features the clarinetist **Matt Mitchell**, the clarinetist **Oscar Noriega**, and the drummer **Ches Smith**. (Jazz Gallery, 1160 Broadway, at 27th St., fifth fl. 646-494-3625. Dec. 3.)

#### Marquis Hill

After turning heads in his native Chicago with his whip-smart playing (and then subsequently winning the 2014 Thelonious Monk Trumpet Competition), Hill has relocated to New York, raising the bar that much higher for our local horn stylists. He leads his ambitious post-bop Blacktet quintet. (Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. Dec. 7.)

### Lionel Loueke Trio

Loueke, a guitarist whose daring rhythmic imagination and world-music-enriched resources always set him apart from the numbingly virtuosic crowd, arrived on the scene with a notably flexible and versatile bass-and-drum team. On his new album, "Gaia," and for this club engagement, Loueke strikes sparks with the bassist **Massimo Biolcati** and the drummer **Ferenc Nemeth**. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Dec. 8-9.)

### Saxophone Summit: Joe Lovano, Dave Liebman, and Greg Osby

While the magisterial horn men Liebman and Lovano are mainstays, the third saxophonist of this triumvirate has changed over time. Here, the alto giant Osby comes aboard to join his compatriots in serious improvisation, which calls on the epochal innovations of John Coltrane. (Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Dec. 4-5.)

### Christian McBride Trio

The supremely accomplished bassist McBride can play seemingly anything, but his commitment to straightforward swing is his life force. His sleek trio, featuring the finger-busting pianist **Christian Sands**, allows McBride to fully indulge his passion. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Dec. 2-8.)

### Aaron Parks with George Garzone

Expect to find yourself shoulder to shoulder with local saxophonists hanging on to every note that the Boston-based tenor legend and famed educator Garzone lets loose. The gifted, harmonically daring pianist Parks joins him in a duet. (Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Dec. 2.)

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What I remembered—or imagined myself  
to remember—of my life in America—be-  
fore I left home!—was terror. And what I  
am trying to suggest by what one imag-  
ines oneself to be able to remember is  
that terror cannot be remembered. One  
blots it out. The organism—the human  
being—blots it out.

Glenn Ligon, *Untitled (My Life in America)*, oil stick and pencil on paper, 1994, Estimate \$75,000 to \$100,000.

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# THE THEATRE



## 'TIS THE SEASON

*Works by Dylan Thomas and Thornton Wilder conjure holidays past.*

**THE LANGUAGE AROUND CHRISTMAS** is usually pretty treacly, as befits the season. But future writers should remember that one of the amazing things about the holiday's ur-text, Charles Dickens's 1843 novella, "A Christmas Carol," is that it's pretty grim, that is to say realistic, when it comes to depicting Scrooge's past and Tiny Tim's present. Without Dickens's eye and ear for extreme emotional and fiscal predicaments, the story's more fantastic moments wouldn't have the weight of truth. It is that balance—between emotional forthrightness and plain good old-fashioned invention—that makes Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales" (presented by the Irish Rep at the DR2 Theatre, through Jan. 3) and Thornton Wilder's beautiful short plays "The Long Christmas Dinner" and "Pullman Car Hiawatha" (presented by the Peccadillo Theatre Company at Theatre at St. Clement's, Dec. 3–Jan. 3) enduring works, too.

Thomas's piece, a forty-five-minute prose poem, sounds like a cello when read aloud, deep and playful. Cobbled together from earlier writings, Thomas's reminiscence about his post-First World War childhood in Wales—when "all the Christmases roll down toward the two-tongued sea"—has the value of lived experience, and humor. Encouraged, in 1952, by two women producers to record it, Thomas arrived unprepared and apparently overserved in the liquor department for the session, but it's his voice that we still associate with the work. The recording sold modestly at first; the book, published posthumously in 1954, went on to become his most popular work in America.

As an example of how meaning is not divisible from sound, Thomas's script affords actors the opportunity to emote through speech rather than behavior; the words are their gestures. And, while Wilder's scripts were written twenty years before Thomas hit the mike, there's something equally free in Wilder's depiction of how memory informs and misinforms the individual, how it binds and separates family in particular, and society in general. The reality that Thomas and Wilder offer us is filtered through memory and the self-absorption that comes with being—and the music that comes with it, too.

—Hilton Als

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

### China Doll

Al Pacino returns to Broadway in a new play by David Mamet, directed by Pam MacKinnon, as a man with a large fortune and a young fiancée. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

### The Color Purple

Jennifer Hudson, Cynthia Erivo, and Danielle Brooks star in a revival of the 2005 musical, based on Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and directed by John Doyle. In previews. (Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Fiddler on the Roof

Danny Burstein plays Tevye, the shtetl patriarch, in Bartlett Sher's revival of the 1964 musical, based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem. In previews. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

### Gigantic

Vineyard Theatre presents a new musical by Matthew roi Berger, Randy Blair, and Tim Drucker, about a boy who goes to weight-loss camp in Pennsylvania. In previews. Opens Dec. 3. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

### Invisible Thread

Diane Paulus directs Matt Gould and Griffin Matthews's musical, in which a young New Yorker volunteers in Uganda. Opens Dec. 2. (Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

### Lazarus

Ivo van Hove directs a new musical by David Bowie and Enda Walsh, inspired by "The Man Who Fell to Earth" and starring Michael C. Hall, Cristin Milioti, and Michael Esper. In previews. Opens Dec. 7. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

### Marjorie Prime

In Jordan Harrison's play, directed by Anne Kauffman and set in the near future, an elderly woman uses artificial intelligence to review her life story. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

### Once Upon a Mattress

Jackie Hoffman and John (Lypsinka) Epperson star in the Mary Rodgers musical about the princess and the pea, revived by Transport Group and directed by Jack Cummings III. In previews. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

### School of Rock

Alex Brightman plays a rocker who poses as a substitute teacher, in this new musical based on the 2003 movie, with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics by Glenn Slater, and a book by Julian Fellowes. In previews. Opens Dec. 6. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

ILLUSTRATION BY CARSON ELLIS

### Take Care

Niegel Smith directs a participatory work by Smith and Todd Shalom, about our responses to imminent danger, systematic racism, and climate change. In previews. Opens Dec. 6. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

### These Paper Bullets!

Billie Joe Armstrong and Rolin Jones wrote this musical adaptation of "Much Ado About Nothing," reset in Beatles-era London and directed by Jackson Gay. In previews. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

### NOW PLAYING

#### The Illusionists—Live on Broadway

A bombastic blend of good tricks and bad taste, this portmanteau magic show has reappeared on Broadway. It stars seven magicians, four of them returning from last year, all of them saddled with a more or less embarrassing sobriquet—"the Unusualist," "the Deceptionist," "the Daredevil." The best acts are the least overblown, as when Adam Trent, "the Futurist," does sweet-natured routines with iPhones and selfies, or when Yu Ho-Jin, "the Manipulator," reveals himself as an elegant master of misdirection. Otherwise, the smoke and lights and punked-out dancers don't do the acts any favors; neither does the video, essential only for the closeup routines and a distraction otherwise. The patter of the host, Jeff Hobson ("the Trickster"), is almost as tawdry as his sequinned shoes, relying heavily on testicle jokes and gay innuendo. At a recent performance, a cockatoo from a live-bird act refused to participate. Sensible bird. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)

#### Important Hats of the Twentieth Century

Nick Jones, who specializes in impish absurdity (he writes for "Orange Is the New Black"), sets his latest comedy in the noirish New York City of the nineteen-thirties. But it's not a period piece, exactly. Two rival couturiers have been duelling for fashion dominance, until one, Paul Roms (Matthew Saldivar), unveils his newest creation: a hoodie. It seems that Paul has swiped a time machine from a local mad scientist and transported himself to a teen-ager's bedroom closet in 1998, passing off the kid's sweatshirts and skate jeans as his own, to great acclaim. As Paul's nemesis, Sam Greevy (Carson Elrod), takes time-travelling matters into his own hands, the insanities mount. Moritz von Stuelpnagel's production, for Manhattan Theatre Club, is as rubbery as a Bugs Bunny cartoon, but lurking beneath the lunacy is a fundamental truth: time renders even the quotidian miraculous. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

#### Night Is a Room

Liana (Dagmara Dominczyk) is sure she's found the perfect fortieth-birthday gift for her husband, Marcus (Bill Heck), who was given up for adoption at birth: a surprise reunion with his birth mother (Ann Dowd). It's a gesture so overwhelmingly well-received that it soon upends the lives of everyone involved. Naomi Wallace's clunky script seems determined to leave offstage precisely those moments that would have been most illuminating to see, resulting in too many recaps by way of impassioned dialogue and a consistent inability to convince. The awkwardness is infectious: Bill Rauch's direction opts for confessional realism when an embrace of the story's inherent absurdity would have been a much richer choice, and the actors struggle

with their Yorkshire accents. But the root fault lies in the words: too many of them, jammed with too many elaborate metaphors that fail to ignite. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

### Pike St.

Nilaja Sun is a conjuror and an athlete, a raucous comedian and a poet of hidden pain, a virtuoso at seemingly every skill the stage requires. She's a razor-sharp writer, too, and in her latest solo show—her first since singlehandedly summoning a whole Bronx classroom in "No Child . . ."—she enacts a day in the life of a Puerto Rican family on the Lower East Side as they wait for a major hurricane to hit, playing every part herself. The production's technical pleasures alone are enough to recommend it: Sun's ability to turn on a dime from a half-drunk Navy SEAL to his hard-hoping sister; the perfect sound cues, designed by the director, Ron Russell, which do as much as Sun to make each scene vivid and clear. Mikiko Suzuki MacAdams's set is as spare as can be, but you'll swear you saw the actual street. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

#### Ugly Lies the Bone

Pain is personal in Lindsey Ferrentino's thoughtful meditation on trauma, directed by Patricia McGregor for the Roundabout. Jess (Mamie Gummer) has returned from Afghanistan, where she was badly burned in an I.E.D. attack, to live with her sister in their Florida home town. But everything's different. Her ex is married, her sister's schlubby boyfriend is everywhere,

and then there are her burns. Jess finds solace in a new high-tech therapy: using virtual-reality goggles, she explores a personalized wonderland (which turns out to be snowy and alpine). Beginning to recover, she learns she's not the only one in pain. In the play's best moments, the V.R. apparatus becomes a symbol of subjectivity: as goggle-clad characters in a bare room gape at projected natural beauty only they can see, Ferrentino reminds us that our internal landscape, like our pain, is ours alone. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. Through Dec. 6.)

#### A View from the Bridge

The atmosphere of romanticized masculinity in Ivo van Hove's production has little to do with the melodramatic, Clifford Odets-like realism of Arthur Miller's script, from 1956. In the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, Eddie (Mark Strong), a tall, sinewy longshoreman, shares his flat with his wife, Beatrice (the laser-sharp Nicola Walker), and his beloved orphaned teen-age niece, Catherine (Phoebe Fox). His feelings for Catherine are overwhelming; she makes him shy, love-struck, in a way that Beatrice does not—or, perhaps, that only Catherine can, largely because she's unattainable. In van Hove's hands, Miller's story of ethical betrayal becomes a story of how bodies look and move in a tragedy. Van Hove treats the text as a kind of libretto, punctuating Miller's flat words with effects, such as the portentous beating of a small drum offstage as Eddie spins more and more out of control. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/23/15.) (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)



## WHY ART?

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## CLASSICAL MUSIC

### OPERA

#### Metropolitan Opera

The forced fun of Jeremy Sams's "*Die Fledermaus*" production won few fans two seasons ago, so the Met is taking a different tack. Calling upon the megawatt talent of the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, who plays the consummate host Orlofsky, and James Levine, who conducts Strauss's sparkling operetta for the first time in his forty-five-year Met career, the company is giving the show's musical values a high polish to match Robert Jones's gilded sets. Susanna Phillips and the Tony winner Paulo Szot reprise their roles from the production's premiere and are joined by Lucy Crowe, Toby Spence, and Dimitri Pittas. (Dec. 4 and Dec. 7 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** Michael Mayer's exuberant but effective Las Vegas-themed production of "*Rigoletto*" turns Verdi's drama of scheming Italian courtiers into a carnival of American excess. The conductor Roberto Abbado heads up the holiday-time run, pacing a cast headed by Nadine Sierra, Piotr Beczala, and Željko Lučić (as Rigoletto). (Dec. 2 and Dec. 8 at 7:30 and Dec. 5 at 8.) • William Kentridge's boldly original new production of Berg's "*Lulu*"—which will win many fans over the years—wraps up its historic run with the same formidable cast that originated it in October: Marlis Petersen, Susan Graham, Johan Reuter, and Daniel Brenna.

Derrick Inouye conducts. (Dec. 3 at 7.) • Franco Zeffirelli's masterly production of Puccini's midwinter tragedy, "*La Bohème*," now deep into its fourth decade, continues to cast an irresistible spell. The conductor Paolo Carignani leads a first-rate lineup of singers, including Ramón Vargas, Barbara Frittoli, Ana María Martínez, and Levente Molnár. (Dec. 5 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

#### Loft Opera: "The Rape of Lucretia"

Britten's first chamber opera (1946) was written amidst the straitened economic circumstances of postwar Britain. It makes sense, then, that the piece would be picked up by this indie opera company, big on ideas but small on budgets, which prizes malleable, versatile works that can fit any number of spaces—such as 501 Union, a former car-restoration shop turned event venue in Gowanus. Dean Buck conducts Laine Rettmer's production, which incorporates live film and projections. (501 Union St., Brooklyn. loftopera.com. Dec. 2, Dec. 4-5, and Dec. 8 at 8. Through Dec. 12.)

#### ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

Augustin Hadelich, the acclaimed young German-Italian violinist who recently won the inaugural Warner

Music Prize, joins the conductorless chamber orchestra in music by Stravinsky (the Divertimento, in a new arrangement by Dmitry Sitkovetsky) and Tchaikovsky. The concert begins with a Handel concerto grosso and concludes with Respighi's fanciful "Gli Uccelli" ("The Birds"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 5 at 7.)

#### The Tallis Scholars: "Christmas Across Centuries"

The enduringly elegant British chamber choir, a longtime favorite in the Miller Theatre series, returns to the Church of St. Mary the Virgin for what should be a compelling holiday program—works ancient and modern by Sheppard, Tallis (the "Missa Puer Natus Est Nobis"), and Arvo Pärt (including "I Am the True Vine"). (145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799. Dec. 5 at 8.)

### RECITALS

#### Juilliard Songfest

Brian Zeger, the artistic director of vocal arts at Juilliard, curates a program of songs by Franz Liszt, the composer who helped shape the Romantic movement while also enjoying proto-Liberace levels of celebrity as a piano virtuoso. Zeger handles the flashy piano parts himself, while student singers explore the composer's lyrically effusive vocal lines; the actor Jacob Fishel reads excerpts from Liszt's letters, connecting themes in his life and art. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Dec. 3 at 7:30.)

#### Evgeny Kissin, Itzhak Perlman, and Mischa Maisky

In one of Carnegie Hall's occasional forays into celebrity chamber music, three popular artists—two superstars and an exuberant iconoclast—gather at Carnegie Hall to perform two mountain peaks of the piano-trio repertory by Schubert (No. 1 in

B-Flat Major) and Tchaikovsky. (212-247-7800. Dec. 3 at 8.)

#### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "Baroque Collection"

The Society has long since expanded its holiday offerings beyond its annual performances of the Brandenburg Concertos. In its first two concerts, a varied group of outstanding soloists (including the violinist Bella Hristova and the lutenist Paul O'Dette) interpret music by Vivaldi, Couperin ("Le Parnasse, ou L'Apothéose de Corelli"), C.P.E. Bach, and others; the third is an intimate evening with the Russian pianist Konstantin Lifschitz, who plays a formidable program that features works by Frescobaldi, Rameau, Bach (the Partita No. 2 in C Minor), and Scarlatti (fourteen sonatas). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Dec. 4 at 7:30 and Dec. 6 at 5; Dec. 8 at 7:30.)

#### Diana Damrau

Craig Rutenberg accompanies one of the Metropolitan Opera's brightest stars in a Carnegie Hall recital featuring sparkling songs by Schubert, Strauss, Poulenc ("Fiançailles pour Rire"), and Dvořák ("Zigeunermelodien"). (212-247-7800. Dec. 6 at 2.)

#### Cygnus Ensemble

The exhibition "Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars" is a fine excuse to bring in this endearingly unconventional ensemble of guitars, strings, and winds to the Morgan Library & Museum; it will perform not only contemporary works by Laura Kaminsky, Jessie Montgomery, and others but also excerpts from two extraordinarily oddball operas, "Transatlantic," by George Antheil, and "Le Testament de Villon," by Ezra Pound (yes, he composed). (Madison Ave. at 36th St. themorgan.org. Dec. 8 at 7:30.)

## MOVIES



### NOW PLAYING

#### Arabian Nights, Volume 1: The Restless One

The first installment in the director Miguel Gomes's passionately investigative, floridly imaginative triptych sets out the ground rules for the series. In 2013 and 2014, Gomes combed Portugal for colorful anecdotes and filmed re-creations of the stories he found. He combined them with bitter visions of citizens bearing the burden of economic aus-

terity, and added a fanciful overlay of legend. Gomes portrays himself as a cinematic Scheherazade, attempting to stave off his own execution by feats of storytelling. His spiraling tales fuse the closing of a shipyard with an entomological disaster; the rigid demands of bureaucrats with a fantasy of erotic revenge; and a satire on judicial and electoral absurdities with a melodrama of teenagers' violent jealousy. The longest episode, centered on a polar-bear

swim on New Year's Day, starts with a medical clinic in a whale's belly and gives rise to Gomes's compassionate, ardently attentive interviews with three cold-water swimmers, all unemployed. With a blend of local lore and partisan fury, theatrical artifice and journalistic inquiry, Gomes single-handedly reinvents the political cinema. In Portuguese.—*Richard Brody* (Film Society of Lincoln Center.)

#### Carol

One day in the nineteen-fifties, Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett), a wife and mother, is shopping for Christmas presents at a department store in Manhattan. She comes across a salesgirl, Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), and they fall in love, right there. (How long has it been, you ask yourself, since a movie delivered a proper

*coup de foudre*?) Todd Haynes's film then follows the women as they meet for lunch, hang out at Carol's home, embark on an aimless journey, and go to bed—conscious, all the while, of what they are risking, flouting, or leaving behind. Therese has a boyfriend (Jake Lacy), and Carol has a husband (Kyle Chandler) and a child, although the maternal instinct gets short dramatic shrift. That feels true to Patricia Highsmith, whose 1952 novel, "The Price of Salt," is the foundation of the film. The fine screenplay is by Phyllis Nagy, who drains away the sourness of the book; what remains is a production of clean and frictionless beauty, down to the last, strokable inch of clothing and skin. Yet Haynes and his stars, for all their stylish restraint, know that elegance alone will not suffice. Inside the showcase is a storm of feeling.



With Sarah Paulson, as Carol's best friend.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/23/15.) (In limited release.)

### Christmas, Again

Charles Poekel's moody, perceptive drama, about a Christmas-tree vender named Noel (Kentucker Audley) on duty in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, is built from the avid accretion of alluring details. Audley, the actors Hannah Gross and Dakota Goldhor, the cinematographer Sean Price Williams, and the editor Robert Greene are independent-scene powerhouses who infuse the film with aestheticized spontaneity—a blend of documentary nuance and dramatic invention. The melancholy Noel, reeling from a breakup, works the night shift. The upside-down hours, the stresses of managing his inexperienced associate (Jason Shelton) and coping with his demanding boss (Bennett Webster), and his uneasy rest in a cramped trailer fray his nerves. When Noel rescues a drunk young woman (Gross) from the nighttime chill, his good deed becomes a burden as well. Poekel zeroes in on the power struggles of work relationships as well as on the salesman's peculiarly intimate, one-sided glimpses into his customers' lives. The hard-won consolations of seasonal sentiment emerge in the searching performances as well as in the impressionistic handheld images.—*R.B.* (MOMA.)

### Creed

This stirring, heartfelt, rough-grained reboot of the "Rocky" series is the brainchild of Ryan Coogler ("Fruitvale Station"), who directed, wrote the story, and co-wrote the script with Aaron Covington. It starts in a juvenile-detention center in Los Angeles, where young Adonis Johnson is confined. He's soon adopted by Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad), Apollo's widow, who informs him that the boxer (who died before Adonis's birth) was his father. As an adult, Adonis (played by Michael B. Jordan) defies Mary Anne to pursue his own boxing career, moving to Philadelphia to be trained by Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), his father's rival. The burly backstory and weight of personal history don't stall the drama but provide its fuel. Coogler—aided by the cinematographer Maryse Alberti's urgent long takes—links the physical sacrifices of boxing and acting alike and binds Adonis's martial passion to his family feeling. (The focussed heat of Jordan's commitment meshes well with Stallone's wry, haunted serenity.) Adonis also finds sweet and mature romance with the rising singer Bianca (played with febrile passion by Tessa Thompson), who has physical struggles of her own. Coogler ingeniously turns the myth of bootstrap-tugging exertions on its head: without family and connections, the new star of the boxing ring wouldn't stand a fighting chance. With Tony Bellew, as the champion whom Adonis challenges.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

### The Danish Girl

A welcome return to the smaller scale for the director Tom Hooper, who seems more at home with the intimacy of "The King's Speech" than with the sprawl of "Les Misérables." This movie, based on historical events, is set in the nineteen-twenties. Eddie Redmayne, deploying the full arsenal of his charm, plays Einar Wegener, who is himself invested, and then engulfed, in the act of performance. With the aid of makeup, expert mimicry, a wig, and a range of elegant dresses, he enters society in the guise of Lili Elbe, supposedly the cousin of his wife, Gerda (Alicia Vikander). Yet this deception proves insufficient, and the story, which begins in Copenhagen and moves to Paris, concludes in Dresden, with transgender surgery. Not that we witness, or learn much about, the pains of that procedure; in

line with the ruthlessly good taste that governs the whole film, it is the ineffable pallor of Redmayne's face that bears the burden of the agony. The skill with which the film negotiates the pitfalls of the theme could not be bettered. Does that very surfeit of propriety, however, not risk smothering the life of the drama? With Matthias Schoenaerts, as Einar's boyhood crush, now an art dealer, and Sebastian Koch, as the surgical pioneer.—*A.L.* (11/30/15) (In limited release.)

### Every Thing Will Be Fine

The director Wim Wenders's decades of artistry are hardly detectible in this melodrama, filmed in 3-D. It's the story of a Canadian writer, Tomas Eldan (James Franco), who, while driving on a desolate road in northern Quebec, accidentally kills a child. Tomas's relationship with his girlfriend, Sara (Rachel McAdams), is on the rocks—she wants children, he doesn't—and after the accident, they break up. The script, by Björn Olaf Johannessens, builds the story into a decade-plus saga. After the accident and a time of raw grief, Tomas's career takes off. He gets involved with Ann (Marie-Josée Croze), who works with his publisher; he reaches out to Kate (Charlotte Gainsbourg), the mother of the child he killed; and he agrees to meet with Christopher (Robert Naylor), the child's older brother, with dramatic consequences. The passing years find the characters unmarked and undeveloped; incidents follow with little inner necessity and virtually no insight into Tomas's passions or processes. The inevitable twists of suspense and dollops of sentiment lack emotional resonance, and the 3-D filming neither adds nor subtracts from images that are devoid of identity.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

### Hitchcock/Truffaut

This joyfully analytical and tautly argued documentary, directed by Kent Jones, links Alfred Hitchcock's preeminent acclaim among critics and filmmakers alike to the publication of François Truffaut's 1966 book of interviews with him. Blending sound clips from the original audiotapes (in which Hitchcock and Truffaut are joined by the translator, Helen Scott) with probingly selected moments from Hitchcock's films as well as interviews with a rarefied handful of current-day directors (including Wes Anderson, David Fincher, and James Gray), Jones presents Hitchcock-philias as a cornerstone of modern-day cinematic classicism. No discordant voices are heard—no director who struggles against the Hitchcock legacy, none who wonders about the sexual obsessions or violent pleasures that come packed in Hitchcock's style. A wider range of interview subjects might have broadened the perspective, yet before criticizing a tradition, it's important to define it, and Jones (a superb critic who now heads the New York Film Festival) offers deep insight into the watershed moment and the enduring forms of Hitchcock's canonization.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

### Legend

Two helpings of Tom Hardy in a single film. He plays both Reggie and Ronald Kray, the sharp-suited, quick-fisted twins who—so the story goes—held sway over much of London in the nineteen-sixties. Though their tale has been told before, Brian Helgeland's movie, from its title onward, continues to revel in their thuggery, as well as in their predilection for crossing the social divide. (At their West End night club, lowlifes mingled with the well bred; each side felt flattered by the other, and by their shared contempt for the middle class. What a country.) Hardy is in bruising form, and his double turn is as adroit as you would expect, featuring a different

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gait and snarl for each twin. But the movie lacks a plot and a sense of purpose. We are led, at a solid pace, through the wavering fortunes of the Krays, the thwarted progress of the policeman (Christopher Eccleston) who pursued them, and the sorry thoughts of Frances (Emily Browning), the local girl who had the bad luck to marry Reggie. With Chazz Palminteri (of course) as an emissary from Meyer Lansky. Now there was a gangster.—*A.L.* (11/23/15) (In limited release.)

### Mustang

The first feature by Deniz Gamze Ergüven has a striking story to tell. The setting is the Turkish coast, a thousand kilometres—or, in cultural terms, a world away—from Istanbul. Five sisters, orphaned long ago, have been raised by their grandmother and their uncle. All five girls are still in school. One day, an innocent seaside game brings a sudden end to their freedoms; computers and phones are removed, and windows are barred, as though to block any access to—or incursions by—the modern world. (Ergüven is too subtle for allegory, but anyone seeking a parable of religious and political splits, in a country required to face both east and west, will have plenty to work with.) The two older girls are married off, only one of them in accordance with her desire. The same fate looms for the other three; their response to that prospect quickens the movie, which has hitherto relied on

a companionable dreaminess, into the realms of impatience and even of suspense. The undoubted star is Günes Sensoy, who plays Lale, the youngest and the fiercest of the sisters, and the only one who puts their hopes of resistance into effect. In Turkish.—*A.L.* (11/30/15) (In limited release.)

### The Night Before

Seth Rogen bursts with inventive exuberance in this schematic but genial holiday comedy about millennials settling down. He plays Isaac Greenberg, a lawyer, husband, and soon-to-be father, who spends Christmas Eve with his two best friends—Chris (Anthony Mackie), a pro football player, and Ethan (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a failing musician—in search of a famous clandestine party that has been their decade-long obsession. Isaac's wife, Betsy (Jillian Bell), sends him off with a special present (a compact cornucopia of drugs) that gives rise to a wild range of outlandish visions and adventures. Each man has his trouble—Ethan tries to reconnect with his ex-girlfriend, Diana (Lizzy Caplan), and Chris tries to score marijuana for his team's quarterback (Aaron Hill) while savoring his fame with a new fan (Ilana Glazer). The movie's sketch-like set pieces blend erotic whimsy and pop-culture voracity; the cleverly deployed supporting cast, including Mindy Kaling, Miley Cyrus, Michael Shannon, and Tracy Morgan, serves a stiff Zeitgeist cocktail. But the

best gags involve Jewish Catskills-style shtick and Christian festivities. Directed by Jonathan Levine.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

### Spotlight

There are many ways in which the new Tom McCarthy film could have gone wrong. The subject could hardly be thornier: the uncovering, by an investigative team at the Boston *Globe*, of widespread sexual abuse by Catholic priests. The victims were children, but we meet them as adults, when they tell their stories. The movie, scripted by McCarthy and Josh Singer, resists any temptation to reconstruct the original crimes, and the sole focus is on the progress of the journalistic task. The result is restrained but never dull, and, barring a couple of overheated moments, when a character shouts in closeup, we don't feel harried or hectored. The film becomes a study in togetherness, both bad and fruitful; on one hand, we get the creepy sense of a community closing ranks, while on the other there is the old-school pleasure of watching an ensemble in full spate. The reporters are played by Michael Keaton, Brian d'Arcy James, Mark Ruffalo, and Rachel McAdams; their superiors, by John Slattery and Liev Schreiber; and the lawyers, by Billy Crudup and Stanley Tucci, who, as usual, calmly pockets every scene in which he appears.—*A.L.* (11/9/15) (In limited release.)

## ABOVE & BEYOND

### Music Video Time Machine

The year's most scenic Seaport days may be behind us, but here's one last excuse to sample a fresh lobster roll. The v.j. and self-described music-video historian Stephan Pitolo catalogues the sky-high hair and blown-out budgets of MTV's golden era with his Music Video Time Machine series. Guests are invited to watch classic music clips on big screens in venues across the city while enjoying food and drink specials, giveaways, and rare music memorabilia. He'll pull from eighties and nineties classics for "Rock Lobster 3: The Perch for Rock," the third installment, hosted at this low-profile South Street Seaport restaurant specializing in seafood and named after the nearby lightship docked in New York Harbor. (Ambrose Beer and Lobster, 18 Fulton St. 212-480-0301. Dec. 4 at 7.)

### AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The collection of the late Robert S. Pirie, a domineering figure in the field of mergers and acquisitions in the nineteen-seventies and a serious bibliophile, goes under the gavel at **Sotheby's** this week. The first two "volumes" (offered Dec. 2-4) are devoted to English books and manuscripts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the lots include rare editions of Shakespeare, Donne, Marlowe, and others. In the third (Dec. 5), attention turns to objects from Pirie's various homes: fancy English silver, drawings, furnishings, and dog paintings. A few days later (Dec. 8), the house holds a sale of ancient Egyptian art that includes a granite statue of Sekhmet—the lion-faced goddess of war—once owned by John Lennon (and later bought by A. Alfred Taubman). (York Ave. at 72nd

St. 212-606-7000.) • More English and American books and manuscripts—including the second installment of a sale devoted to the collection of the late Charles E. Sigety—will be auctioned off at **Christie's** on Dec. 7-8. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • **Swann** pulls out a trove of maps and atlases on Dec. 8, including a copy of William Faden's 1777 "North American Atlas," a volume that includes maps—based on eye-witness reports—detailing important battles in the American Revolution. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

### READINGS AND TALKS

#### Strand Bookstore

Fifty years ago, the writer Gay Talese spent three months observing Frank Sinatra and submitted "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" to *Esquire*, setting a new standard for magazine profiles that would hold for decades to come. His distant yet affectionately detailed account of the aging star in moments of honest self-doubt engrossed readers and fellow-writers alike, and he was all the more noteworthy for never actually having interviewed the celebrity. In a rare engagement celebrating what would be Sinatra's hundredth birthday, Talese revisits his groundbreaking piece, now republished by Taschen Books with photographs, reproductions of manuscript pages, and correspondence from the writer's archive. (828 Broadway, at 12th St. 212-473-1452. Dec. 3 at 7.)

#### Rizzoli Bookstore

The early film world, which William Cameron Menzies entered as a young set designer and art director, primarily sought to capture the dramatics of the theatre behind the static filter of the silver

screen. But as productions became more ambitious, during the late nineteen-thirties, employing visual elements beyond casting and dialogue to engage audiences, there was more room to influence a film without ever writing or reciting a line. The term "production designer" was invented specifically to credit the unprecedented visual direction that Menzies contributed to films like "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "Gone with the Wind," and he went on to direct classics like "Invaders from Mars" (1953). James Curtis, the author of the biography "William Cameron Menzies: The Shape of Films to Come," converses with the Hitchcock documentarian Kent Jones about how these two film-world titans came to collaborate on nineteen-forties classics like "Spellbound" and "Foreign Correspondent." (1133 Broadway. 212-759-2424. Dec. 4 at 6.)

#### New York Public Library

Café Cino, at 31 Cornelia Street, was not originally conceived as a theatrical venue. But the clientele who frequented Joe Cino's Greenwich Village coffee shop between 1958 and 1968 included young playwrights to whom he took a liking, and whom he invited to stage experimental, subversive works that would function entirely outside of Broadway's commercial interests and legal restrictions. Off Off Broadway, as the scene came to be known, attracted early works from John Guare and offered freshman roles for Al Pacino. On Dec. 7 at 6, the self-described "accidental archivist" Magie Dominic shares stories and artifacts from the landmark space. (New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, 40 Lincoln Center Plaza. 212-870-1630.)





## TABLES FOR TWO

# AVANT GARDEN

130 E. 7th St. (646-922-7948)

**THE WARNING, IN OCTOBER**, from the World Health Organization that processed and red meat likely cause cancer could generate a spike in plant-based cuisine. It could also be a boon for the latest project from Ravi DeRossi, an Indian-Italian restaurateur, who recently made a wise bet by diversifying his portfolio of indulgence-based businesses (themed cocktail bars and fondue restaurants) to include a new vegan spot in the East Village. DeRossi, who is himself mostly vegan and mostly sober, calls it his “passion project,” along with a vaguely defined new nonprofit, Benefits to End Animal Suffering Today (BEAST).

When dining at Avant Garden, you get the sense of having travelled through a wormhole to an alternate universe where animal products never existed, so they could never be missed. As in most dream worlds, a lot of the details don’t make much sense, like the burgundy polyester cloth napkins atop an ostentatiously large slab of brown marble-esque countertop (which turns out to be petrified wood). Just under half of the twenty-eight seats in the restaurant are bar height, but these are the most comfortable stools you’ll ever sit in—upholstered and generously wide for the chic, slim patrons, many of them longtime vegans with the youthful glow of abstemiousness.

The menu is divided into three parts: toast, cold, and hot. For the toasts, between all the whipped, puréed, and chopped vegetables spread atop thickly sliced Balthazar bread, butter is all but forgotten. (Instead, the kitchen uses various cooking oils, some of which create a sharp smoky smell when they burn; the small dining room could be better ventilated.) Carrot-harissa toast, sweet and creamy yet still vegetal, is the clear standout. A faux ceviche of paper-thin king-oyster mushrooms tossed with white-soy ponzu and jalapeño is refreshingly light and bright, with a meaty bite. Cubed beets and mango over creamy avocado has the look of a tartare but the taste of a zesty high-end guacamole, rounded out with savory notes of black sesame and tamari. Potato cannelloni arrives looking more like a pirouline, and is pleasingly hot, salty, and crispy, a contrast to the thick coins of eggplant “merguez” beneath it, so soft it practically dissolves. Spaghetti pomodoro with capers, basil, and bread crumbs is exactly as it sounds: an unbeatable, already vegan classic.

But vegans are allowed to have fun, too—Avant Garden’s diverse wine list includes many full-bodied reds, poured generously in oversized glasses. The other night, two young bloggers left the restaurant, giggly and stuffed. They headed off down East Seventh Street, taking no notice of the tiny storefronts serving cupcakes, ice cream, and porchetta sandwiches.

—Silvia Killingsworth

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# FOOD & DRINK

## BAR TAB GENUINE LIQUORETTE

191 Grand St. (646-726-4633)

“High-low humor is really the name of the game right now,” Eben Freeman said of his choice to make electric-blue Hpnotiq the liquor of the month at his new bodega-chic bar in Little Italy. A sheet of car-wash plastic stands in for the door; Tecate boxes prop up chrome-rimmed tables. Freeman may be one of New York’s most talented bartenders (his molecular mixology, honed at wd-50, is often credited with creating the current cocktail craze), and his technical skills are on display with his Hpnotiq Fizz (ethereal, balanced, citrusy without being overly acidic), but his expertly crafted drinks are very much beside the point here. “I thought it’d be funny,” Freeman says. But after drinking a cha-chunker you can’t help but feel that the joke’s on you. The drinks are named for a Freeman invention that cha-chunks the hole of pop-top cans wide enough to insert inverted mini-bar-size alcohol bottles. A Jamo & Ginga (ginger ale topped with a Jameson nip, plus lemon and some bitters) tastes like a gussied-up dorm-room cocktail and drinks like the regrettable make-out session that ensues: inconsistent, awkward, and unnecessarily sloppy. Other options: wine and beer are self-serve from the fridges, and all the alcohol bottles lining the store are up for grabs, priced by the gram. What goes with apple-pie-flavored moonshine? Not Freeman’s problem. “I’ll probably run out of ironic liquor at some point.”

—Becky Cooper





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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT UNSAFE CLIMATES

In Syria, the rainy season begins in November and ends in April. Only a third of the country's farms have irrigation systems; the rest depend on what the season supplies them with, which, even in good years, isn't all that much. The northeasternmost province of Al Hasakah, where much of Syria's wheat is grown, receives an average of about eleven inches of rain a year, which is what New York is likely to get between Labor Day and Thanksgiving.

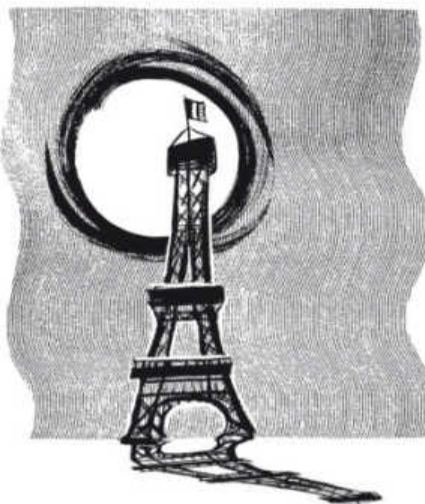
In the winter of 2007, the rainy season never really began. The next year was worse; the country experienced its driest winter on record. Wheat production failed, many small farmers lost their herds, and prices of basic commodities more than doubled. In the summer of 2008, according to a leaked diplomatic cable, Syria's minister of agriculture told officials from the United Nations that the consequences of the drought, both economic and social, were "beyond our capacity as a country to deal with." Meanwhile, Syria's representative to the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization warned American officials that the situation was contributing to "a perfect storm" that could undermine the country's stability, and asked for aid. (The Americans, the leaked cable shows, were unmoved by this appeal.) The drought persisted through the following winter and the winter after. Hundreds of thousands of people abandoned the countryside and moved to cities like Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo. There they joined more than a million similarly desperate Iraqi refugees.

On the list of horrors that led to Syria's civil war, it's hard to know how high to place the drought or its destabilizing consequences—the spike in food prices, the internal displacement, the further crowding of already overcrowded cities. Certainly, it ranks below the repressive brutality of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Still, as Secretary of State

John Kerry put it recently, in a speech about climate change and national security, it's probably "not a coincidence" that the war was preceded by four years of failed rains. Kerry also observed, "Because the world is so extraordinarily interconnected today—economically, technologically, militarily, in every way imaginable—instability anywhere can be a threat to stability everywhere." This was, explicitly, an allusion to ISIS, which arose out of the civil war's chaos. Three days after Kerry made these remarks, the attacks in Paris took place.

This week, as the banks of flowers and tributes to the dead continue to grow on the Place de la République, world leaders will gather in Paris to try to reach an accord on climate change. Owing to security concerns, the French government cancelled many of the events that had been planned around the talks, including a rally that was expected to attract two hundred thousand people, and has installed sensors on the city's water supply to guard against a chemical strike while negotiations are in progress.

Officially, the meeting is the twenty-first annual Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or, in U.N. parlance, COP21. Since previous COPs have, for the most part, ended in failure and bitterness, COP21 is trying a new approach. Each country has been asked to offer a plan for reducing its own greenhouse-gas emissions; these plans will then be incorporated into a broader framework. As of this writing, a hundred and seventy-five countries have submitted targets. The United States has pledged to reduce its emissions by twenty-six per cent, against a baseline of 2005, while the European Union nations have said they will cut their emissions by forty per cent, against the lower baseline of 1990. China, which is the world's largest emitter,



has promised that its carbon output will peak by 2030.

This bring-your-own-plan approach should reduce the chances of a stalemate; still, some major—and potentially deal-breaking—issues need to be resolved by negotiators this week. One of these, which may seem paradoxical, is what to do about the fact that the plans are inadequate. Several independent studies have concluded that, even if every country lives up to its target, warming will far exceed two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). This is the limit that many of the same world leaders who are meeting in Paris vowed five years ago not to cross.

Another unresolved issue is money. Developing countries, which, so far at least, have contributed relatively little to climate change, are, in many cases, likely to suffer the worst effects of it. These countries have, collectively, been promised a hundred billion dollars a year to help deal with problems like sea-level rise, and to adopt cleaner energy systems. Only a fraction of that amount has been raised. The Obama Administration has pledged three billion dollars, but, in an effort to muck up the negotiations in Paris from a distance, Senate Republicans have vowed to block any U.S. contribution. “We want to make sure that any of these countries that think they’re going to have a check to cash be-

cause of an agreement that the president may make in Paris—that they shouldn’t cash the check just yet,” Senator John Barrasso, Republican of Wyoming, told *Politico*.

Which brings us back to Syria. A recent study by researchers at Loyola Marymount University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology concluded that unabated warming would render Persian Gulf cities like Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Dhahran virtually unlivable in a matter of decades. “A plausible analogy of future climate for many locations in Southwest Asia is the current climate of the desert of Northern Afar on the African side of the Red Sea, a region with no permanent human settlements,” the researchers wrote.

One of the most robust predictions that can be made about climate change is that it will send millions—perhaps tens or hundreds of millions—of people in search of new homes. And, in an “extraordinarily interconnected” world, disaster cannot be cordoned off. By mid-century, which, in the scheme of things, is not very long from now, the Syrian-refugee crisis is likely to seem routine. Rather than playing games with the federal budget, security-minded Republicans should be doing everything they can to insure that Paris succeeds.

—Elizabeth Kolbert

## DEPT. OF SAFE SPACES RESETTLED



In the office of a refugee-resettlement nonprofit in New Haven, Connecticut, last week, a volunteer showed a colleague her wedding photographs, on a laptop. A Syrian man, in his early forties, wearing a leather jacket and a mustache, joined them; the volunteer laughed, and switched to Arabic. The man, who used to own a takeout grilled-meat shop in a now ruined and emptied neighborhood of Homs, smiled at a photograph of Central Park in driving rain.

He had been in the United States for ten weeks, and although he spoke only a few words of English, and although his classes in cultural orientation had not introduced him to the notion of Donald Trump, he was conscious of the fact that, in the days since the terrorist attacks in Paris, the United States had discovered an appetite for unwelcoming rhetoric about people like him. Thirty-one governors had declared their states unwilling to accept more Syrian refugees; the House of Representatives had passed a bill calling for increased security checks;

and the owner of an air-conditioning firm in Danbury, an hour away, had begun an online petition, addressed to Dannel Malloy, Connecticut’s still welcoming governor, decorated with two photographs—young blond children; a phalanx of armed ISIS fighters—and the caption “Mommy! Daddy! Our new neighbors are moving in!” Against this backdrop, but primarily because he feared Syrian-government reprisals against relatives still in his home country, the refugee wanted to be known only by his first initial, M.

At the office of IRIS—Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services—M. had picked up a bag of donated winter coats; he also accepted, with a moment’s awkwardness, a bundle of Walmart gift cards. Heba Gowayed, the volunteer—an Egyptian-American who is researching refugee resettlement for a Ph.D. at Princeton—drove him home. M. talked about the early days of the Syrian revolution, in 2011, when he turned on Al Jazeera, tried to explain the events to his children, and wondered if an odd smell in the air came from chemical weapons.

His new home is a second-floor apartment on a quiet street east of the Yale campus. Gowayed hugged M.’s wife. They were joined by three children: a fifteen-year-old boy with a firm handshake, the suggestion of a mustache, and a tendency to blush; a thirteen-year-old

girl, in a blue hijab, who said she had ambitions to become a nutritionist; and a girl aged seven, who, according to her parents, cried every day before and after school, defeated by the language. She sat forward on the sofa, looking through binoculars made by looped fingers, and at one point asked her parents if they’d been kidding when they promised her a laptop if she persevered at school. They had been. M. has not yet found a job, and IRIS will stop contributing to his rent before the end of the year.

In 2011, Homs became a battleground. In the spring of the following year, the family—Sunni Muslims—reached Amman, in Jordan, and registered as refugees. There then began a screening process that included two interviews with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and three with the International Organization for Migration. The family didn’t request a destination. But, for reasons unknown to them, the U.N.H.C.R. asked if they would like to be considered for settlement in the United States. (Between 2012 and September of this year, the U.S. accepted fewer than two thousand Syrian refugees; Germany took ninety thousand.)

M. replied, “Of course!” His wife had a moment’s unease about American acceptance of the hijab. Their son was giddy.



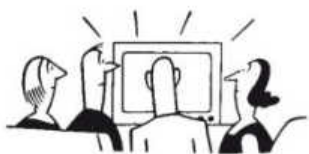
"It's the *strongest* citizenship," he recalled thinking. His mother added, "The world's armies move for Americans." (The son has hopes of becoming an F.B.I. agent; the most memorable sight on a recent school trip to New York was a Batmobile in a museum exhibit.) He quoted a family song: "It was 'Let's go to America, where they'll mend our broken hearts.'" He laughed, and—under the influence of family pride, and embarrassment about family goofiness—reddened. "That was the only line."

M. and his family were repeatedly fingerprinted. In interviews, they were asked the same biographical questions again and again. The boy summarized the process in two questions: "Do you want to go to America?" "Did you engage in terrorist activities?" If this was burdensome, it was not offensive, at least seen from the perspective of eventual success: "I don't want the people who destroyed Syria to come to America," M. said. "I'm trying to *escape* terrorism." In February, in Amman, the family was interviewed by an agent from the Department of Homeland Security, who spoke to them from behind glass.

The family reached the United States on September 17th. After the Paris attacks, M. said, "I'm more anxious than before, when my wife and daughter go out on the street." But he made the case that talk of making the resettlement of Syrian Muslims to the U.S. harder was merely "a political conversation," not the discovery of national heartlessness. He was more keen to contemplate the behavior of a teacher at his older daughter's school, who, on her first alarming day in class, had said how pleased he was to see a hijab in the room, and noted that it gave her great character.

—Ian Parker

## TRIPLE THREAT ON ICE



Uzo Aduba stepped out onto the ice. It was dusk in Prospect Park. The skating rink at the LeFrak Center was hosting an event called Monster Skate. Witches and bumblebees orbited to

"The Addams Family" theme song. Aduba, who wore black (blazer, Valentino shades), took a few warmup strokes, her center of gravity low over rental skates. Then she pivoted and, in a fluid motion, spun around and began skating backward. "It's like flying!" she said. She offered pointers to a wobblor: "You have to let go of the fear. Stand in your body. Own it. If you think you're going to fall, you will."

Her fellow-skaters tried not to stare. Aduba stars in "Orange Is the New Black," the Netflix women's-prison series, in which she plays an inmate known as Crazy Eyes—an oddball who wears her hair in Bantu knots and is known for quirks like "marking her territory." She sings, too. This week, she'll play Glinda the Good Witch on NBC's "The Wiz Live!," alongside Queen Latifah ("dying") and Mary J. Blige ("hashtag get into it"). But before all this Aduba was a competitive figure skater. She skated for ten years, starting at the age of five. "There was a point I was skating every day of the week, minus Sunday," she said, executing a neat crossover step. "I could do a triple Salchow, a double Axel, a triple flip. No triple loop—that was always my worst jump, that inside edge."

Aduba grew up in Medfield, Massachusetts, in one of the town's few black families. "There were maybe four others." Her mother, a social worker, and her father, a banker, emigrated from Nigeria after the Biafran civil war. They had five kids, and they wanted them to take advantage of America's opportunities—which meant lots of lessons. "My sister took ballet," Aduba said. "We all played instruments." When she brought home a flyer for lessons at the Natick skating club, her mother signed her up. Speed, fresh air—"My spirit, my heart couldn't get enough." A younger brother joined her. "We were both addicted," Aduba said. (He recently retired from the Missouri Mavericks, a minor-league hockey team.) "We were just a Nigerian family, out on the ice. My mom was, like, 'Of all the things these children could be attracted to!'"

A man in a Lycra Ninja Turtle costume whipped past. Aduba focussed on his form: "See how free he feels? You can see the freedom inside his bones."

Her skating career was a victim of its

own success: when a coach lobbied for her to leave school to train, "my parents were, like, 'That's never happening.'" She switched to track and became a state-champion sprinter. Meanwhile, a choir teacher had figured out that she could sing, which led to youth chorus and a degree in voice performance at Boston University, where she discovered acting. When she was cast in "Orange," in 2012, she'd been a working actor in New York for ten years, living in Astoria and "clearing eight hundred dollars a month," despite



Uzo Aduba

roles on Broadway. The character of Crazy Eyes sparked something in her. "I came into my audition with the knots in my hair," she said.

"Orange" has been praised for expanding the range of women's roles on TV, and Aduba said that she is often approached by people thanking her "for creating a space for mental illness, for different sexual orientations, for gender issues, for women of color, for ageism, sizeism—all the things the show addresses."

"I know what it's like to be other," Aduba said. For years, she closed her mouth when she had her picture taken, to hide the gap in her front teeth. (She'd asked for braces, but her mother wouldn't hear of it. "She was, like, 'Don't you know that in Nigeria a gap is a sign of beauty and intelligence?'" ) In high school, a yearbook photographer told her to smile more, and something clicked. "He said, 'I think you have a beautiful smile.' My mom had said it my whole life, but, for some reason, when he said it it rang in

my ear differently. Now I smile all the time, even on red carpets, when you're supposed to look fierce."

It was getting late. Stepping off the ice, Aduba was approached by a security guard, who told her, "The supervisor wants to see you." In the LeFrak Center office, a woman named Simone extended a hand and said, "I'm the rink manager." She said that her wife had introduced her to "Orange Is the New Black."

Another employee, Krystal, said, "My girlfriend and I just binge-watch."

Simone laughed. "Can you get the gist? It's a whole bunch of lesbians in here!"

Aduba posed for pictures, smiling broadly. "Thank you for watching!" she said, adding that she'd be back. "I'm going to buy some skates."

—Lizzie Widdicombe

## THE MUSICAL LIFE THE SCREAM



In the past two decades, Marlis Petersen, the German soprano, has starred in ten different productions of "Lulu," Alban Berg's dark, atonal opera about a young woman who, having been despoiled—raised on the streets, she is taken as a much older man's mistress at the age of twelve—despoils back, ravaging husbands and lovers before meeting a gruesome end. After more than

ninety performances in the role, Petersen is retiring it: her current Lulu, in William Kentridge's acclaimed production at the Met, will be her last. "It matures," she said backstage the other evening. "In the beginning, you start like a virgin in the approach to this role. Then, after you have done it two or three times, you suddenly get a revelation: maybe she does *this* because of *this*. It is never the same. It always stays new. I always come like a white canvas, and the directors, they write stories on me."

Also in Petersen's dressing room was Jennifer Roderer, a mezzo-soprano who is a member of the Met company, and who has been serving as the operatic equivalent of Petersen's stunt double: when, at the opera's conclusion, Lulu is killed, offstage, by Jack the Ripper, it is Roderer, not Petersen, who delivers the final, bloodcurdling scream. Petersen explained, "When you have sung this role, you are already wounded in the voice—if you do this on top, the next performance is in danger." Roderer warms up with a few howls in the stairwell. "I haven't just sung for three hours, so it doesn't cost a lot," she said.

For Petersen's final outing as Lulu, on December 3rd, she has decided to do the scream herself. "The last one is the real goodbye," Petersen said. "It's her death, you know, and I want to do this personally. I want to really experience it. It will be exciting, and I will be very, very emotional. I *have* to do it. I will kick her into the universe." The decision to retire the role was precipitated by an accident during Petersen's most recent "Lulu" in Munich, last spring:

she walked full tilt into a glass wall onstage, and broke her nose. "My whole white dress was like in a butchery," she said. "I have the feeling that this, you know, it is like a sign."

The accident allowed Petersen to reflect upon the role that the character Lulu has occupied in her own life. "She has sneaked so much into my whole being—it is like in every cell there is Lulu," she said. "This character leaves a shadow on your soul. It is not that I *play* her. I have to *be* her, and that is a very demanding thing. I thought, after all these years it is time for me, as a woman, to let go. She rules me in a way. It is not that I *am* Lulu, but she is demanding. And how you act with men sometimes—is a little bit influenced by this. I have decided to let this go, and to see who, actually, Marlis Petersen is."

Petersen, who is forty-seven, is unmarried and does not have children. "She had the greater power on me," she said, simply. "I think if she hadn't been there maybe I would have decided my life differently. But she has influenced me a lot. She is not an opera role for me, actually. She is a higher power." When Petersen decided to relinquish Lulu, she experienced violent headaches and stomach aches. "It was like I was skinning myself—changing my skin—and I didn't expect that," she said. "It was really like they take an organ out of me."

In the current production, Petersen and Roderer stand close together backstage for the moment of Lulu's death; when Roderer screams, Petersen clutches her arm, before falling to the ground. "We are very connected," Petersen said. "I feel her very much." For the last performance, Petersen will be there alone—with Lulu.

"It is like a baby," Petersen said. "I was impregnated, and then you give birth to her, and you raise her, and now she is ready to live her own life—and I become myself!" She gave a yelp of delight, momentarily hysterical. "But I am really thankful for her, that she was there for me," she went on, soberly. "In the beginning, I was, like, 'I have to get her out!' And I have learned now—no, I don't have to get her out. She is there anyway. I embrace her; I love her; we are on good terms now. She is ready to go, and I am ready to let her go."

—Rebecca Mead





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These are tough times for the coal industry. Coal-burning plants generate less than forty per cent of the electricity in the U.S., down from more than half just a few years ago. At least twenty-six coal companies have gone bankrupt since 2008. The Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan requires power companies to cut carbon emissions, which almost certainly means using less coal. And if this week's climate-change summit in Paris succeeds in establishing firm goals for cutting emissions coal will undoubtedly be the biggest loser. So it's no surprise that congressional Republicans, who cast a symbolic vote last week to scuttle the Clean Power Plan, complain of a "war on coal." But if there really is a war the U.S. government doesn't seem to know what side it's on.

Consider, for instance, the Powder River Basin—an immense area of north-eastern Wyoming and southeastern Montana, which contains the richest coal deposits in the U.S. In the past few decades, Powder River has become our most important coal-producing region. More than forty per cent of the coal we burn is mined there—nearly five hundred million tons every year. According to the Center for American Progress, that makes Powder River responsible for thirteen per cent of America's energy-related greenhouse-gas emissions.

Unlike the Appalachian coal fields back East, almost the entire basin belongs to the government, which leases the coal rights to mining companies. You might think that regulators would manage this land with an eye toward the coal's impact on the environment in the U.S., or at least would insure that the government was getting a fair price for its assets. But you'd be wrong. Back in 1990, the Bureau of Land Management declared that the Powder River Basin was not a "federal coal-production region." That decertification meant that, instead of the government's picking which tracts of land it would lease and then putting them up for bid, coal companies could effectively do the picking themselves. As Mark Squillace, a professor of natural-resources law at the University of Colorado, told me, "This turned a program that was supposed to be proactively managed by the government into one that is entirely reactive to the demands of the coal industry." And while the law stipulates that all mining leases are subject to competitive bidding, the Center for American Progress found that, since 1990, nearly ninety per cent of federal coal leases have had just one bidder. That's held down the price of leases, in effect handing the coal industry a giant subsidy. A study released in Sep-

tember by a coalition of research groups found that production subsidies in the basin amount to nearly three billion dollars a year.

Besides costing the taxpayer billions, these subsidies have had a dismal impact on the environment: by artificially holding down the price of coal, they've encouraged utilities to use more of it than they otherwise would, slowing the transition to natural gas and renewables. The September study concluded that simply making coal companies in Powder River pay fair-market value for their leases would lead to a substantial reduction of carbon emissions. But we should go further than that. The federal coal program doesn't consider what economists call the "social costs" of burning coal—most obviously, its impact on air pollution and climate change. These costs may be hard to quantify—though the Center for American Progress estimates them at sixty-two dollars per ton of Powder River coal—but they're plainly real. "We've known for a long time that

emissions from coal burning were a serious problem," Squillace says. "Yet we have never tried to account for those social costs when we think about how much coal we're going to lease."

What this means is that we've ended up with a coal policy that's totally incoherent. The Clean Power Plan aims at getting U.S. power plants to use less coal, but we're still subsidizing coal companies to produce more of it. And though the Bureau of Land Management has taken steps to reform the bidding process, it continues to lease coal rights to companies at the same old rates. Meanwhile, with U.S. demand for coal steadily declining, companies are hoping to ship Powder River coal abroad to satisfy demand from India and, especially, China,

where coal prices are significantly higher. In other words, even as we're trying to cut our use of coal at home, we're planning to send it off to pollute the world's atmosphere from China or India instead. And while the Obama Administration is killing the Keystone XL pipeline, it is letting mining in Powder River proceed apace.

What's needed is a fundamental transformation in the government's relationship to the coal industry. Instead of trying to maximize the amount of coal mined on federal lands, we should be trying to minimize it. That means not just charging more but leasing less. And it means taking the social costs of coal seriously. Last week, the British government announced that it planned to phase out all coal-burning plants by 2025. That's more than we can reasonably expect in the U.S., where coal will likely remain a part of the energy mix for many years. But the British decision makes clear that we can, and should, be doing much more than instituting competitive bidding. In the end, the best plan for a lot of the coal we own is also the simplest: just leave it in the ground.

—James Surowiecki







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# TEACH YOURSELF ITALIAN

*For a writer, a foreign language is a new kind of adventure.*

BY JHUMPA LAHIRI



## EXILE

My relationship with Italian takes place in exile, in a state of separation.

Every language belongs to a specific place. It can migrate, it can spread. But usually it's tied to a geographical territory, a country. Italian belongs mainly to Italy, and I live on another continent, where one does not readily encounter it.

I think of Ovid, exiled from Rome to a remote place. To a linguistic outpost, surrounded by alien sounds.

I think of my mother, who writes poems in Bengali, in America. Almost fifty years after moving there, she can't find a book written in her language.

In a sense I'm used to a kind of lin-

guistic exile. My mother tongue, Bengali, is foreign in America. When you live in a country where your own language is considered foreign, you can feel a continuous sense of estrangement. You speak a secret, unknown language, lacking any correspondence to the environment. An absence that creates a distance within you.

In my case there is another distance, another schism. I don't know Bengali perfectly. I don't know how to write it, or even read it. I have an accent, I speak without authority, and so I've always perceived a disjunction between it and me. As a result I consider my mother tongue, paradoxically, a foreign language.

As for Italian, the exile has a different aspect. Almost as soon as we met, Italian and I were separated. My yearn-

ing seems foolish. And yet I feel it.

How is it possible to feel exiled from a language that isn't mine? That I don't know? Maybe because I'm a writer who doesn't belong completely to any language.

I buy a book. It's called "Teach Yourself Italian." An exhortatory title, full of hope and possibility. As if it were possible to learn on your own.

Having studied Latin for many years, I find the first chapters of this textbook fairly easy. I manage to memorize some conjugations, do some exercises. But I don't like the silence, the isolation of the self-teaching process. It seems detached, wrong. As if I were studying a musical instrument without ever playing it.

In graduate school, I decide to write my doctoral thesis on how Italian architecture influenced English playwrights of the seventeenth century. I wonder why certain playwrights decided to set their tragedies, written in English, in Italian palaces. The thesis will discuss another schism between language and environment. The subject gives me a second reason to study Italian.

I attend elementary courses. My first teacher is a Milanese woman who lives in Boston. I do the homework, I pass the tests. But when, after two years of studying, I try to read Alberto Moravia's novel "La Ciociara" ("Two Women") I barely understand it. I underline almost every word on every page. I am constantly looking in the dictionary.

In the spring of 2000, six years after my first trip to Italy, I go to Venice. In addition to the dictionary, I take a notebook, and on the last page I write down phrases that might be useful: *Saprebbe dirmi? Dove si trova? Come si fa per andare?* Could you tell me? Where is? How does one get to? I recall the difference between *buono* and *bello*. I feel prepared. In reality, in Venice I'm barely able to ask for directions on the street, a wakeup call at the hotel. I manage to order in a restaurant and exchange a few words with a saleswoman. Nothing else. Even though I've returned to Italy, I still feel exiled from the language.

A few months later, I receive an invitation to the Mantua literary festival. There I meet my first Italian publishers. One of them is also my translator. Their publishing house has a Spanish name,





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*"The coffee is free, but now we rent the tables."*

Marcos y Marcos. They are Italian. Their names are Marco and Claudia.

I have to do all my interviews and presentations in English. There is always an interpreter next to me. I can more or less follow the Italian, but I can't express myself, explain myself, without English. I feel limited. What I learned in America, in the classroom, isn't sufficient. My comprehension is so meagre that, here in Italy, it doesn't help me. The language still seems like a locked gate. I'm on the threshold, I can see inside, but the gate won't open.

Marco and Claudia give me the key. When I mention that I've studied some Italian, and that I would like to improve it, they stop speaking to me in English. They switch to their language, although I'm able to respond only in a very simple way. In spite of all my mistakes, in spite of my not completely understanding what they say. In spite of the fact that they speak English much better than I speak Italian.

They tolerate my mistakes. They correct me, they encourage me, they provide the words I lack. They speak clearly, patiently. Just like parents with their children. The way one learns one's native language. I realize that I didn't learn English in this fashion.

Marco and Claudia give me this

turning point. In Mantua, thanks to them, I finally find myself inside the language. Because in the end to learn a language, to feel connected to it, you have to have a dialogue, however child-like, however imperfect.

## THE CONVERSATIONS

Returning to America, I want to go on speaking Italian. But with whom? I know some people in New York who speak it perfectly. I'm embarrassed to talk to them. I need someone with whom I can struggle, and fail.

One day I go to the Casa Italiana at New York University to interview a famous Roman writer, a woman, who has won the Strega Prize. I am in an overcrowded room where everyone but me speaks impeccable Italian.

The director of the institute greets me. I tell him, in Italian, that I would have liked to do the interview in Italian. That I studied the language years ago but I can't speak well.

"Need practicing," I say.

"You need practice," he answers kindly.

In the spring of 2004, my husband gives me something. A piece of paper torn from a notice that he happened to see in our neighborhood, in Brook-

lyn. On it is written "*Imparare l'italiano*"—"Learn Italian." I consider it a sign. I call the number, make an appointment. A likable, energetic woman, also from Milan, arrives at my house. She teaches in a private school, she lives in the suburbs. She asks me why I want to learn the language.

I explain that I'm going to Rome in the summer to take part in another literary festival. It seems like a reasonable motivation. I don't reveal that Italian is an infatuation. That I cherish a hope—in fact a dream—of knowing it well. I don't tell her that I'm looking for a way to keep alive a language that has nothing to do with my life. That I am tortured, that I feel incomplete. As if Italian were a book that, no matter how hard I work, I can't write.

We meet once a week, for an hour. I'm pregnant with my second child, who will be born in November. I try to have a conversation. At the end of every lesson, the teacher gives me a long list of words that I lacked during the conversation. I review it diligently. I put it in a folder. I can't remember them.

At the festival in Rome I manage to exchange three, four, maybe five sentences with someone. After that I stop; it's impossible to do more. I count the sentences, as if they were strokes in a tennis game, as if they were strokes when you're learning to swim.

In spite of the conversations, the language remains elusive, evanescent. It appears only with the teacher. She brings it into my house for an hour, then takes it away. It seems concrete, palpable, only when I'm with her.

My daughter is born, and four more years go by. I finish another book. After its publication, in 2008, I receive another invitation to Italy, to promote it. In preparation I find a new teacher. An enthusiastic, attentive young woman from Bergamo. She, too, comes to my house once a week. We sit next to each other on the couch and talk. We become friends. My comprehension improves sporadically. The teacher is very encouraging, she says I speak the language well, she says I'll do fine in Italy. But it's not true. When I go to Milan, when I try to speak intelligently, fluently, I am always aware of the mistakes that hamper me, that confuse me, and I feel more discouraged than ever.



In 2009, I start studying with my third private teacher, a Venetian woman who moved to Brooklyn more than thirty years ago, who brought up her children in America. She's a widow, and lives in a house surrounded by wisteria, near the Verrazano Bridge, with a gentle dog that's always at her feet. It takes me nearly an hour to get there. I ride the subway to the edge of Brooklyn, almost to the end of the line.

I love this trip. I go out of the house, leaving behind the rest of my life. I don't think about my writing. I forget, for several hours, the other languages I know. Each time, it seems like a small flight. Awaiting me is a place where only Italian matters. A shelter from which a new reality bursts forth.

I am very fond of my teacher. Although for four years we use the formal *lei*, we have a close, informal relationship. We sit on a wooden bench at a small table in the kitchen. I see the books on her shelves, the photographs of her grandchildren.

Magnificent brass pots hang on the walls. At her house, I start again, from the beginning: conditional clauses, indirect discourse, the use of the passive. With her my project seems more possible than impossible. With her my strange devotion to the language seems more a vocation than a folly.

We talk about our lives, about the state of the world. We do an avalanche of exercises, arid but necessary. The teacher corrects me constantly. As I listen to her, I take notes in a diary. After each lesson I feel both exhausted and ready for the next. After saying goodbye, after closing the gate behind me, I can't wait to return.

At a certain point the lessons with the Venetian teacher become my favorite activity. As I study with her, the next, inevitable step in this odd linguistic journey becomes clear. At a certain point, I decide to move to Italy.

## THE RENUNCIATION

I choose Rome. A city that has fascinated me since I was a child, that conquered me immediately. The first time I was there, in 2003, I felt a sense of rapture, an affinity. I seemed to know it already. After only a few days, I was sure that I was fated to live there.

I have no friends yet in Rome. But I'm not going there to visit someone. I'm going in order to change course, and to reach the Italian language. In Rome, Italian can be with me every day, every minute. It will always be present, relevant. It will stop being a light switch to turn on occasionally, and then turn off.

In preparation, I decide, six months before our departure, not to read in English anymore. From now on, I pledge to read only in Italian. It seems right, to detach myself from my principal language. I consider it an official renunciation. I'm about to become a linguistic pilgrim to Rome. I believe I have to leave behind something familiar, essential.

Suddenly, none of my books are useful. They seem like ordinary objects. The anchor of my creative life disappears, the stars that guided me recede. I see before me a new room, empty.

Whenever I can—in my study, on the subway, in bed before going to sleep—I immerse myself in Italian. I enter another land, unexplored, murky. A kind of voluntary exile. Although I'm still in America, I already feel elsewhere. Reading, I feel like a guest, happy but disoriented. Reading, I no longer feel at home.

I read Moravia's "Gli Indifferenti" ("Time of Indifference") and "La Noia" ("The Empty Canvas"). Pavese's "La Luna e i Falò" ("The Moon and the Bonfires"). The poetry of Quasimodo, of Saba. I manage to understand and at the same time I don't understand. I renounce expertise to challenge myself. I trade certainty for uncertainty.

I read slowly, painstakingly. With difficulty. Every page seems to have a light covering of mist. The obstacles stimulate me. Every new construction seems a marvel, every unknown word a jewel.

I make a list of terms to look up, to learn. *Imbambolato*, *sbilenco*, *incrinatura*, *capezzale* (dazed, lopsided, crack, bed-side or bolster). *Sgangherato*, *scorbutico*, *barcollare*, *bisticciare* (unhinged, crabby, sway, bicker). After I finish a book, I'm thrilled. It seems like a feat. I find the process demanding yet satisfying, almost miraculous. I can't take for granted my ability to accomplish it. I read as I did when I was a girl. Thus, as an adult,



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as a writer, I rediscover the pleasure of reading.

In this period I feel like a divided person. My writing is nothing but a reaction, a response to reading. In other words, a kind of dialogue. The two things are closely bound, interdependent.

Now, however, I write in one language and read exclusively in another. I am about to finish a novel, so I'm necessarily immersed in the text. It's impossible to abandon English. Yet my stronger language already seems behind me.

I think of two-faced Janus. Two faces that look at the past and the future at once. The ancient god of the threshold, of beginnings and endings. He represents a moment of transition. He watches over gates, over doors, a god who is only Roman, who protects the city. A remarkable image that I am about to meet everywhere.

## THE DIARY

I arrive in Rome with my family a few days before the mid-August holiday. We aren't familiar with this custom of leaving town en masse. The moment when nearly everyone is fleeing, when almost the entire city has come to a halt, we try to start a new chapter of our life.

We rent an apartment on Via Giulia, a very elegant street that is deserted in mid-August. The heat is fierce, unbearable. When we go out shopping, we look for the momentary relief of shade every few steps.

The second night, a Saturday, we come home and the door won't open. Before, it opened without any problem. Now, no matter how I try, the key doesn't turn in the lock. There is no one in the building but us. We have no papers, are still without a functioning telephone, without any Roman friend or acquaintance. I ask for help at the hotel across the street from our building, but two hotel employees can't open the door, either. Our landlords are on vacation in Calabria. My children, upset, hungry, are crying, saying that they want to go back to America immediately.

Finally a locksmith arrives and gets the door open in a couple of minutes. We give him more than two hundred euros, without a receipt, for the job.

This trauma seems to me a trial by fire, a sort of baptism. And there are many other obstacles, small but annoying. We don't know where to take the recycling, how to buy a subway and bus pass, where the bus stops are. Everything has to be learned from zero. When we ask for help from three Romans, each of the three gives a different answer. I feel unnerved, often crushed. In spite of my great enthusiasm for living in Rome, everything seems impossible, indecipherable, impenetrable.

A week after arriving, the Saturday after the unforgettable night, I open my diary to describe our misadventures. That Saturday, I do something strange, unexpected. I write my diary in Italian. I do it almost automatically, spontaneously. I do it because when I take the pen in my hand I no longer hear English in my brain. During this period when everything confuses me, everything unsettles me, I change the language I write in. I begin to relate, in the most exacting way, everything that is testing me.

I write in a terrible, embarrassing Italian, full of mistakes. Without correcting, without a dictionary, by instinct alone. I grope my way, like a child, like a semiliterate. I am ashamed of writing like this. I don't understand this mysterious impulse, which emerges out of nowhere. I can't stop.

It's as if I were writing with my left hand, my weak hand, the one I'm not supposed to write with. It seems a transgression, a rebellion, an act of stupidity.

During the first months in Rome, my clandestine Italian diary is the only thing that consoles me, that gives me stability. Often, awake and restless in the middle of the night, I go to the desk to compose some paragraphs in Italian. It's an absolutely secret project. No one suspects, no one knows.

I don't recognize the person who is writing in this diary, in this new, approximate language. But I know that

it's the most genuine, most vulnerable part of me.

Before I moved to Rome, I seldom wrote in Italian. I tried to compose some letters to an Italian friend who lives in Madrid, some e-mails to my teacher. They were like formal, artificial exercises. The voice didn't seem to be mine. In America it wasn't.

In Rome, however, writing in Italian is the only way to feel myself present here—maybe to have a connection, especially as a writer, with Italy. The new diary, although imperfect, although riddled with mistakes, mirrors my disorientation clearly. It reflects a radical transition, a state of complete bewilderment.

In the months before coming to Italy, I was looking for another direction for my writing. I wanted a new approach. I didn't know that the language I had studied slowly for many years in America would, finally, give me the direction.

I use up one notebook, I start another. A second metaphor comes to mind: it's as if, poorly equipped, I were climbing a mountain. It's a sort of literary act of survival. I don't have many words to express myself—rather, the opposite. I'm aware of a state of deprivation. And yet, at the same time, I feel free, light. I rediscover the reason that I write, the joy as well as the need. I find again the pleasure I've felt since I was a child: putting words in a notebook that no one will read.

In Italian I write without style, in a primitive way. I'm always uncertain. My sole intention, along with a blind but sincere faith, is to be understood, and to understand myself.

## THE METAMORPHOSIS

Shortly before I began to write these reflections, I received an e-mail from a friend in Rome, the writer Domenico Starnone. I had been in Rome for a year. Referring to my desire to appropriate Italian, he wrote, "A new language is almost a new life, grammar and syntax recast you, you slip into another logic and another sensibility." How much those words reassured me. They contained all my yearning, all my disorientation. Reading this message, I understood better the impulse





to express myself in a new language: to subject myself, as a writer, to a metamorphosis.

Around the same time that I received this note, I was asked, during an interview, what my favorite book was. I was in London, on a stage with five other writers. It's a question that I usually find annoying; no book has been definitive for me, so I never know how to answer. This time, though, I was able to respond without any hesitation that my favorite book was the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. It's a majestic work, a poem that concerns everything, that reflects everything. I read it for the first time twenty-five years ago, in Latin, as a university student. It was an unforgettable encounter, maybe the most satisfying reading of my life. To understand this poem I had to be persistent, translating every word. I had to devote myself to an ancient and demanding foreign language. And yet Ovid's writing won me over: I was enchanted by it. I discovered a sublime work, a living, enthralling language. I believe that reading in a foreign language is the most intimate way of reading.

I remember vividly the moment when the nymph Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree. She is fleeing Apollo, the love-struck god who pursues her. She would like to remain alone, chaste, dedicated to the forest and the hunt, like the virgin Diana. Exhausted, the nymph, unable to outstrip the god, begs her father, Peneus, a river divinity, to help her. Ovid writes, "She has just ended this prayer when a heaviness pervades her limbs, her tender breast is bound in a thin bark, her hair grows into leaves, her arms into branches; her foot, a moment before so swift, remains fixed by sluggish roots, her face vanishes into a treetop." When Apollo places his hand on the trunk of this tree "he feels the breast still trembling under the new bark."

Metamorphosis is a process that is both violent and regenerative, a death and a birth. It's not clear where the nymph ends and the tree begins; the beauty of this scene is that it portrays the fusion of two elements, of both beings. The words that describe Daphne and the tree are right next to each other (in the Latin text, *frondem/crines, ramos/*

*braccia, cortice/pectus*; leaves/hair, branches/arms, bark/breast). The contiguity of these words, their literal juxtaposition, reinforces the state of contradiction, of entanglement. It gives us a double impression, throwing us off. It expresses in the mythical, I would say primordial, sense the meaning of being two things at the same time. Of being something undefined, ambiguous. Of having a dual identity.

Until she is transformed, Daphne is running for her life. Now she is stopped; she can no longer move. Apollo can touch her, but he can't possess her. Though cruel, the metamorphosis is her salvation. On the one hand, she loses her independence. On the other, as a tree, she remains forever in the wood, her place, where she has a different sort of freedom.

As I said before, I think that my writing in Italian is a flight. Dissecting my linguistic metamorphosis, I realize that I'm trying to get away from something, to free myself. I've been writing in Italian for almost two years, and I feel that I've been transformed, almost reborn. But the change, this new opening, is costly; like Daphne, I, too, find myself confined. I can't move as I did before, the way I was used to moving in English. A new language, Italian, covers me like a kind of bark. I remain inside: renewed, trapped, relieved, uncomfortable.

Why am I fleeing? What is pursuing me? Who wants to restrain me?

The most obvious answer is the English language. But I think it's not so much English in itself as everything the language has symbolized for me. For practically my whole life, English has represented a consuming struggle, a wrenching conflict, a continuous sense of failure that is the source of almost all my anxiety. It has represented a culture that had to be mastered, interpreted. I was afraid that it meant a break between me and my parents. English denotes a heavy, burdensome aspect of my past. I'm tired of it.

And yet I was in love with it. I became a writer in English. And then, rather precipitously, I became a famous writer. I received a prize that I was sure I did not deserve, that seemed to me a mistake. Although it was an honor, I remained suspicious of it. I couldn't connect myself to that recognition, and yet it changed my life. Since then, I've been considered a successful author, so I've stopped feeling like an unknown, almost anonymous apprentice. All my writing comes from a place where I feel invisible, inaccessible. But a year after my first book was published I lost my anonymity.

By writing in Italian, I think I am escaping both my failures with regard to English and my success. Italian offers me a very different literary path. As a writer I can demolish myself, I can reconstruct myself. I can join words together and work on sentences without ever being considered an expert. I'm



*"Do you know why I pulled you over? Do you? Do you? Yes, you do."*

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bound to fail when I write in Italian, but, unlike my sense of failure in the past, this doesn't torment or grieve me.

If I mention that I'm writing in a new language these days, many people react negatively. In the United States, some advise me not to do it. They say they don't want to read me translated from a foreign tongue. They don't want me to change. In Italy, even though many have encouraged me to take this step, many support me, I'm still asked why I have a desire to write in a language that is much less widely read in the world than English. Some say that my renunciation of English could be disastrous, that my escape could lead me into a trap. They don't understand why I want to take such a risk.

These reactions don't surprise me. A transformation, especially one that is deliberately sought, is often perceived as something disloyal, threatening. I am the daughter of a mother who would never change. In the United States, she continued, as far as possible, to dress, behave, eat, think, live as if she had never left India, Calcutta. The refusal to modify her aspect, her habits, her attitudes was her strategy for resisting American culture, for fighting it, for maintaining her identity. Becoming or even resembling an American would have meant total defeat. When my mother returns to Calcutta, she is proud of the fact that, in spite of almost fifty years away from India, she seems like a woman who never left.

I am the opposite. While the refusal to change was my mother's rebellion, the insistence on transforming myself is mine. "There was a woman, a translator, who wanted to be another person": it's no accident that "The Exchange," the first story I wrote in Italian, begins with that sentence. All my life I've tried to get away from the void of my origin. It was the void that distressed me, that I was fleeing. That's why I was never happy with myself. Change seemed the only solution. Writing, I discovered a way of hiding in my characters, of escaping myself. Of undergoing one mutation after another.

One could say that the mechanism of metamorphosis is the only element of life that never changes. The journey of every individual, every country, every historical epoch—of the entire universe

and all it contains—is nothing but a series of changes, at times subtle, at times deep, without which we would stand still. The moments of transition, in which something changes, constitute the backbone of all of us. Whether they are a salvation or a loss, they are moments that we tend to remember. They give a structure to our existence. Almost all the rest is oblivion.

I think that the power of art is the power to wake us up, strike us to our depths, change us. What are we searching for when we read a novel, see a film, listen to a piece of music? We are searching, through a work of art, for something that alters us, that we weren't aware of before. We want to transform ourselves, just as Ovid's masterwork transformed me.

In the animal world metamorphosis is expected, natural. It means a biological passage, including various specific phases that lead, ultimately, to complete development. When a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly it's no longer a caterpillar but a butterfly. The effect of the metamorphosis is radical, permanent. The creature has lost its old form and gained a new, almost unrecognizable one. It has new physical features, a new beauty, new capacities.

A total metamorphosis isn't possible in my case. I can write in Italian, but I can't become an Italian writer. Despite the fact that I'm writing this sentence in Italian, the part of me conditioned to write in English endures. I think of Fernando Pessoa, a writer who invented four versions of himself: four separate, distinct writers, thanks to which he was able to go beyond the confines of himself. Maybe what I'm doing, by means of Italian, resembles his tactic. It's not possible to become another writer, but it might be possible to become two.

Oddly, I feel more protected when I write in Italian, even though I'm also more exposed. It's true that a new language covers me, but unlike Daphne I have a permeable covering—I'm almost without a skin. And although I don't have a thick bark, I am, in Italian, a tougher, freer writer, who, taking root again, grows in a different way. ♦

*(Translated, from the Italian,  
by Ann Goldstein.)*



# HOW TO LIVE AN ALTERNATIVE-COMEDY LIFE STYLE

BY MIKE O'BRIEN



At some point, you may have thought, I wish I was funnier. But not in a lame, mainstream Hollywood way. Not funny like the guys in sitcoms who make sarcastic quips. I wish I was weird-funny. I wish people told stories about me. Did you hear about the hilarious thing that Mike did yesterday? He rode a cow through Central Park. He went to a Trump rally as a joke. He got “NSync” tattooed on his back.

I wish my life was a series of memorable, alternative-comedy moments.

It's not as hard as it seems. Here are some tips:

As a warmup, spend a few hours a week in a senior citizens' home. Never let on that you're there as a goof. In order to make people think that you're a real volunteer, actually help the pa-

tients. Get to know their children and their grandchildren. Earn their trust. Then, after eight or nine years, give a long speech about the intelligence and precision of the Japanese Army during the Second World War. The old people will hate it, but they'll all be in wheelchairs or whatever, so you'll be fine.

After you stop volunteering at the senior citizens' home, get the most normal job ever. The more normal, the more hilarious. On most days, stroll in a little late, with your hair parted down the middle, and say, “Sorry I'm late. I was just livin' on the edge. Are y'all Aerosmith fans?”

Your colleagues may think that you're joking, but you should actually be a huge Aerosmith fan. It's funny only if you find a way to do it in earnest.

Mess with everyone by putting a whole roasted pig with an apple in its mouth in the break-room fridge. (Before you do this, become a great cook so you can prepare the pig yourself and carve it for everyone.)

Memorize your co-workers' favorite conversation topics. Discuss these with them, and let their knowledge genuinely impress you. This may sound difficult, but once you're in the alternative-comedy groove your questions will flow naturally. If you become invested in your co-workers themselves, and therefore in their answers, they will never figure out that your presence at the office is a gag.

Identify the least cool secretary in your joke workplace and ask her to have lunch with you every day. Make a genuine attempt to get her into hip-hop. Pick a terrible local rapper and take her to every one of his shows. If you can trick a loser secretary into loving hip-hop while convincing a crappy rapper that he's actually got fans, that's a two-for-one alt-comedy joke. Andy Kaufman would be jealous!

Marry the secretary—the ultimate goof. But, to make sure that she doesn't suspect anything, really fall in love and give her your whole heart. Make up nicknames for each other. Have silly traditions. The whole deal. Trust me, if you can manage the little mental trick whereby you actually love her so much that you'll do anything for her, she'll be none the wiser.

To heighten the joke, have kids. Raise them as if they aren't a gag. Love them and tell them that they can accomplish anything, all the while kind of winking to yourself, thinking, I can't believe they're buying this crap.

If you really commit to being a full-on weirdo, your years of pranking will pay off in a hilarious indie-film-style ending on your deathbed. You'll be surrounded by co-workers from your fake job and your wife and children from your hilarious joke marriage.

One final prank: tell the people gathered at your bedside that you meant every word you've ever said to them, and that you love them. And, again, if you want it to be really hilarious, mean it. Then chuckle to yourself and die. ♦

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

## BRONX DREAMS

*A community project to change the world with art.*

BY IAN FRAZIER

Alizah Olivo is eight years old and lives in the South Bronx. Her father, Nelson, works as the maintenance supervisor at a homeless shelter, and her mother, Carmen, registers admittances in an emergency room. Alizah has three brothers and one sister; she is the second youngest. The family's apartment is on the fourth floor of a recently con-

Public Theatre's Public Works program, which puts on plays in Central Park in the summer, and from the director Lear deBessonet, who believes in theatre for the people and uses casts of hundreds in her shows. She finds the hundreds mostly through community-based organizations like DreamYard. Nelson Olivo had been a dancer and a street

DreamYard also joined the cast. Elijah Olivo, who was ten, played Mamillius, the son of the King of Sicilia—a speaking part. The other Olivos were shepherds or shepherdesses.

I happened to see that show. Colors and crowds and music and cameo acts filled the stage more or less constantly. At one point, a group of shepherds and shepherdesses entered and sat down on a raised section, center stage. Suddenly, from near the first row, audience right, a little girl hopped out of her seat, ran straight onto the stage, and sat down among them. She did this as if impelled by a dream, as if she knew she belonged there.

The audience did a double take and held its breath. Everybody I've talked



*DreamYard holds poetry contests, puts on plays, runs arts festivals, makes political posters, and even inspired a high school.*

structed apartment building on Washington Avenue, in the Morrisania section. On the building's first and basement levels is the DreamYard Project, the largest arts organization in the Bronx.

In 2013, the Olivos noticed a sign in the building's lobby asking people to try out for parts in a production of "The Tempest." The invitation came from the

musician, and he wanted his family to get a taste of performing. He and Alizah and one of her brothers tried out for the play, and they all got parts. Alizah was six.

The next year, more of the Olivos tried out for "The Winter's Tale," another Public Works production. Twenty-some other people who came by way of

to who was there remembers this moment. What would happen? Even the actors stood suspended. Finally, a stagehand wearing a headset came from the wings and led the little girl back to her seat. She had been completely in the spirit of the production, and the audience applauded her to the skies.

By some roundabout logic, I gave



DreamYard partial credit for that wild moment. Seeing the Olivos' pictures in the program, I wanted to meet them, and when I eventually did, I asked Alizah if she remembered the little girl. She not only remembered but could describe her two ponytails. She said she had wanted to get closer to her when she came onto the stage, to try and take her into the group.

The DreamYard Project has a patriotic attachment to the Bronx. Two young actors, Jason Duchin and Tim Lord, founded it, twenty-one years ago, to teach public-school kids in grades K through twelve by using the arts. The idea was to recruit teachers from among working artists of Duchin's and Lord's acquaintance in New York and match them with schools whose funding for arts education had been cut. Through a few changes, that has been DreamYard's basic mission from the start. For some years, the teaching program was in several boroughs, but today it's only in the Bronx, where DreamYard-sponsored artists in forty-five schools teach about ten thousand students.

DreamYard also holds poetry contests between local kids and kids in other countries via Skype, makes posters for political protests, supplies art work for parks and other public spaces, holds acting workshops for adults, helps to paint designs on local apartment-building rooftops in heat-reflecting paint, and runs arts festivals. It believes that art can save the world.

At its headquarters in the Olivos' building, which it calls the Community Arts Center, it also teaches classes in all kinds of arts after school, on Saturdays, and in the summer, almost every day. About thirty administrators and teachers work at the center. (Some of them are also among the teaching artists who go into the schools.) Everything DreamYard provides at the center is free. Some of the students there are from the neighborhood, but many come from farther away in the Bronx or from other boroughs. Of the kids who participate long-term in the center's on-site programs, ninety-eight per cent graduate from high school and go on to college—an achievement, considering that the over-all rate of high-school graduation in the Bronx is just above fifty per cent. In 2012, DreamYard won a National Arts and

Humanities Youth Program Award as one of the best out-of-school arts programs in the country. Michelle Obama presented the award at the White House. In the center's street windows are pictures of people from DreamYard posing with her and looking ecstatic.

For a while last spring, I was going up to the center every week or so and hanging out with the staff and the kids. It's a congenial place, with student art work on the walls, administrators' desks in a cubicle area, wide-open rehearsal rooms, a cafeteria-lounge space, and art classrooms with interior windows. The atmosphere is like a theatre's backstage or a small-town recreation center. On a usual day, kids come surging through.

Michela Adjei-Ocran lives in East Tremont, about a mile and a half from the center. Her parents are from Ghana. Her father works as a cook at a day school and her mother does cleaning at a Pentecostal church that the family also attends. Michela found out about DreamYard from a teaching artist at her high school four years ago, when she was a freshman. She is a petite young woman who wears below-the-knee dresses, round glasses, and a gold cross on a chain around her neck. She does the complicated African braiding of her hair herself.

Her parents met in Naples, Italy, where each had stopped in the course of youthful wanderings. In Naples, her father washed cars and worked in a car factory and her mother helped a woman who ran a textile shop. When Michela was six, the family moved to Treviso, near Venice. Her parents knew a bit about art and took their children into Venice to see paintings and sculptures and famous buildings. "Oh, my goodness, we went to look at great art so many times I got sick of it," Michela told me.

The family left Italy for the Bronx, with a brief stop in New Jersey, when Michela started fifth grade. At first, the Bronx seemed strange to her, especially riding on public transportation that wasn't boats. From middle school in East Tremont, she continued to Marble Hill School of International Studies, where a DreamYard drama teacher recommended that she take classes in visual art from Carla Repice, a longtime DreamYard teacher. Last May, near the end of Michela's senior year, Repice told

her that the Metropolitan Museum was looking for summer interns. "If I had known that eight hundred other students were applying for the same job as I was, I never would have tried," Michela said. Perhaps being a fluent Italian speaker of Ghanaian background from the South Bronx who knew a lot about the art of Venice set her apart. She was chosen for the internship and spent the summer working in the Met's collection of Italian Renaissance drawings. In the fall, she started at the College of St. Rose, in Albany, on a full scholarship that DreamYard helped her get, and she is saving up for graduate school. Which one? "Yale!"

Repice is usually called Carla. She is a slim, quiet woman with curly brown hair and bright brown eyes. When she started teaching for DreamYard, fifteen years ago, its offices were in a maintenance closet in a school in Harlem. "I've been teaching at Marble Hill for so long now—ten years—that I even have my own classroom, like a real art teacher from the past," she told me. A graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago, she works in various media; after September 11th, she made a wooden effigy called "Goatscape" and left it near the World Trade Center site so that passersby could attach whatever they wanted to it. The effigy ended up covered in layers of handwritten notes and photos and money, and it now resides in a warehouse of 9/11 artifacts in Queens.

Repice keeps track of her students as they move through high school and into college. Along with teaching, she helps kids with their portfolios for college applications and curates student art shows. "I started with DreamYard because I wanted to get involved up here, and no other arts provider had such a focus on the Bronx," Repice said. "Plus, they offered health insurance. I try to show kids how their personal history intersects with the history of this unique place where they live. I show them YouTube clips about buildings in the nineteen-seventies being torched for the insurance, and I ask, 'How does that affect you?'"

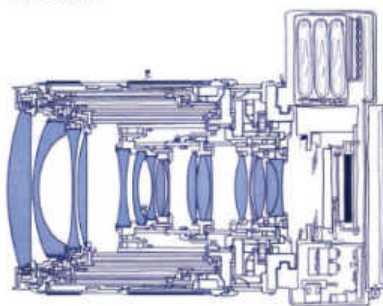
A ten-minute walk from the center is a housing project called the Forest Houses—fifteen high-rise apartment buildings in a complex with well-tended lawns, a playground, and a basketball

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court with concrete bleachers. Last year, a young man named Darin Capehart was shot to death in the lobby of the Forest Houses high-rise at 730 East 166th Street. After the shooting, police arrested two suspects, one twenty-two and the other twenty. A year and a half earlier, a stray bullet from a shoot-out near the playground had killed Lloyd Morgan, Jr., a four-year-old boy. When I wandered by the Forest Houses one afternoon, I talked to an older man named Mark Davidson, who had just come out of the shiny steel door of 730 East 166th. "Yes, I knew him," he said, when I asked about Capehart. "His nickname was Doony or D.J. He was just a kid—a good guy."

Walking to DreamYard from the subway one morning, I came upon a small crowd along Third Avenue. A steady rain was falling. Police had stopped four young men in a car, and three patrol cars had pulled over—one alongside the vehicle, one ahead, and one behind. People on the sidewalk were recording the stop on their phones. Five policemen and one policewoman stood next to or behind the stopped car, and the two on the passenger side brought the young men out of the car and made them lean over with their hands on it.

One young man had no coat and was getting wet in the rain. He asked the police if he could retrieve his coat from the car. He reached into the back seat, slowly brought out the coat, put it on with great slowness and caution, and again leaned over against the car. On the faces of the detainees as well as of the cops was an expression of deep, almost sorrowful gravity.

Edwin Velasquez is twenty-three and lives in Baychester, in the northeast Bronx. He has the trim, muscular build of a jockey or a bantamweight boxer, and he wears his black hair cropped close to his head. He is happy to tell people how DreamYard changed his life. After middle school, he was assigned to a small Bronx high school that had been shoe-horned into the building of another high school. The students in the other school resented the newcomers, who were easy to identify because they wore uniforms, which got them beat up. Gangs prevailed, and armed New York City police patrolled the halls. Velasquez's father, a superintendent for the Transit

Authority in charge of third-rail maintenance, besieged school authorities to have him transferred, and finally a sympathetic principal found him a place in a newly opened high school for technology and computer studies.

There Velasquez met a girl he wanted to go out with, but her family were recent immigrants from Ecuador, and her father would barely let her leave the house, much less date. The one exception was for art classes at DreamYard. Velasquez decided that he, too, had an interest in art. He found he was good at the work, and, when the girl stopped taking the classes (and dating him), he kept at it. He began spending more time at DreamYard, took more classes, and eventually became Carla Repice's assistant. For a wall installation that DreamYard put in the parking lot, he painted an imposing, stylized Bronx landscape—No. 5 train, elevated tracks, Harlem River, and Manhattan skyline.

Meanwhile, he had got to know DreamYard's landlord, Peter Magistro. In an art class, Velasquez made a 3-D architectural model that Magistro saw and admired. Magistro is the head of Bronx Pro Group, a real-estate management and development company. He had DreamYard's current space designed and built specifically to house the center. A stately, soft-spoken man and a lifelong Catholic who wears a white handkerchief in the breast pocket of his dark suits, he became a developer because of his faith. He believes in providing apartments for low-income people and putting art work in buildings. The front entries of most Bronx Pro buildings have doorframes that say, across the top, "With God's Love, All Things Are Possible."

Magistro wanted to make a park in an unused lot between two of his buildings on Andrews Avenue South, in Morris Heights, and asked artists from DreamYard to design and decorate it. So they would have a sense of what he wanted, he took fifteen kids and five chaperons to Barcelona to see the modernist buildings and mosaics of Antoni Gaudí, and then on to Rome. Velasquez had never been out of the country except for trips to visit family in Puerto Rico. What he saw in Spain and Italy dazzled him. After he came back, he contributed many Gaudí-inspired mosaics to the park, known as Hayden Lord Park.



FROM THE CREATOR OF "XKCD"  
AND AUTHOR OF "WHAT IF?"

## THIS IS HOW... A PENCIL WORKS.

### PROBLEM FIXER

This used to be made from tree blood, but now it's usually made from a kind of plastic (which is made from very old dead things).

### WOOD PART

Most of the wood for most writing sticks comes from one kind of tree. Writing-stick makers like that tree because the wood smells nice and doesn't break off into little pieces that get stuck in your hand.



A "writing stick": just one of the things used to make a magazine.



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Velasquez graduated from high school, went to City College, and received his degree, in business administration, in 2014. He applied to work at Bronx Pro, which immediately found a job for him. As assistant project manager, he does everything from polishing chandeliers to planning new property renovations. He wants to stay in the Bronx and build more affordable housing, believes that Peter Magistro is a great man, and considers DreamYard his family for always.

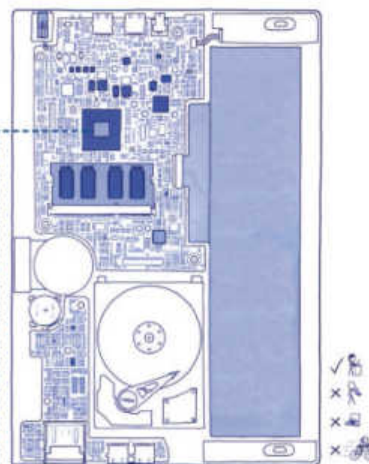
He told me all this in Hayden Lord Park on a fiercely hot summer afternoon. The surroundings had a cooling influence. Mosaics on a nautical theme cover the park's back wall, bird and flower mosaics decorate curving benches, a fruit and vegetable garden stretches in rows. While we were talking, a park assistant came to him with a used hypodermic syringe that she had just found under an apple tree. "Well, that happens," Velasquez said, as she walked to a trash can with the syringe held between thumb and forefinger. "What can I tell you? We're in a city."

Sometimes I sat in on classes at the Scenter and watched DreamYard's educational philosophy in action. It encourages attention to the individual and an awareness of wrongs in society—an approach known as "social-justice pedagogy." In a drama class one afternoon, about a dozen high-school kids were discussing a new bill in Kentucky that would restrict the use of public restrooms by transgender people. The class had begun to write a one-act play about it. In an adjoining studio, two girls, one with red hair piled up high, were rehearsing a scene taken from 911 transcripts of an incident in which a Cincinnati policeman shot and killed a woman involved in a domestic dispute. One of the drama teachers, Yusef Miller, a playwright and actor, suggested that the girls change a line to make its meaning clearer. The red-haired girl said that they wanted to stay with exactly what the woman says in the transcript. Miller thought a moment and said, "That's a very sensitive thing to look at. That's very loyal, and I applaud y'all."

In a dance class with a long mirror, the teacher, Kimani Fowlin, told the ten girls and three boys to take a word or a

FROM THE CREATOR OF "XKCD"  
AND AUTHOR OF "WHAT IF?"

## THIS IS HOW... A LAPTOP'S CPU WORKS.



### THINKING BOX

Lots of parts of a computer "think" in different ways, but this is what we usually call the "thinking" part. It's a machine for quickly following a set of steps that are written down as numbers.

Following steps might not be "thinking." But it's hard to say for sure. That's one of those things where not only do we not know the answer, we're not sure what the question is.

A "bending computer": just one of the things used to make a magazine.



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line from poems they had written and “actualize that word or line through movement.” She said, “Express who you are with all your perspectives.” When two of the boys hung back, she said, “That’s great, shyness is wonderful!” The boys still looking skeptical, she said, “Now, you’re going to think of the word or line you want to express, and just accept being shy. Now step into the circle. That’s right. You don’t even have to move, just own the space you’re in. That space belongs to you. Just be a shape in it, and own it.”

Cydney Gray, who was the center’s program coordinator, also helped teach classes that emphasized identity awareness. “In every class, I see the kids learn, and the light go on,” she told me. “After a class recently, I saw a little girl, one of the kids I teach, wearing a boy’s hat, and some of the other kids were telling her that she shouldn’t be wearing it, because the hat was for a boy. She said to them, ‘This is what is called gender stereotyping!’—exactly what I’d been teaching—and I was, like, ‘Yessss! My life is valid!’”

In 2006, having taken note of DreamYard’s success, the Department of Education created DreamYard Prep, a small arts-based public high school. DY Prep, as it’s known, occupies part of the fourth floor of the massive, Fort Knox-like building on East 172nd Street that used to be Taft High School. About three hundred and thirty students attend DY Prep, which shares the building with six other special-focus schools. Beyond a common outlook on education, DreamYard and DY Prep have no administrative or day-to-day connection, though their students and personnel sometimes overlap. DY Prep’s principal, Alicia Wargo, started as a teaching artist with DreamYard, became a teacher and then an assistant principal at the high school, and took over as principal four years ago. She is from Altoona, Pennsylvania, and used to be an abstract artist with a studio in Greenpoint.

When I asked if I could visit DY Prep, Wargo first quizzed me over the phone. She said that she was protective of her school and of her kids. On the morning I showed up, she met me in her office and laid out my schedule for the day

down to the minute, principal-like. She said the halls would be loud and I should not be surprised by that. Before we left her office for the first class, she asked me to remove my baseball cap. Caps and other headgear (with the exception of head scarves and hijabs) are forbidden.

The hallways were indeed loud as the kids changed classes. Wargo walked amid the confusion with brisk authority and seemed to know every student’s name. As part of the no-hats rule, DY Prep students cannot wear hoodies over their heads. A hooded jacket is allowed, but the hood must be down. Whenever Wargo saw a boy with his hood up, she stopped him, folded the hood down, looked in his eyes, smiled, and said, “Hoodies down! You know that, [whatever the boy’s name was].” Then she smoothed the hood behind his neck and gave it a pat and sent him off.

Jason Duchin and Tim Lord, DreamYard’s co-founders, are now in their late forties. Though they co-direct the organization, as they have done from its beginning, their pictures don’t appear among those of other DreamYard people in the center’s windows. Both wear light-colored Oxford shirts and jeans when no special event is scheduled at work. Duchin stands six-two and somehow manages always to maintain the same three-day growth of beard. Often he wears a faded red baseball cap that says “Ruby River” on it; the Ruby is a trout river in Montana. Lord is slighter of build, and smooth-shaven, and his straight blond hair falls across his forehead. Both come from lively backgrounds. Lord’s grandmother Mary Pillsbury Lord was a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and succeeded her as the U.S. representative to the U.N. Human Rights Commission, in the nineteen-fifties, and his father was an independent-school headmaster and later the director of an international children’s news service.

Duchin, a man of big gestures and enthusiasms, is the son of Peter Duchin, the bandleader. Peter Duchin is the son of the late Eddy Duchin, ditto. The story of Eddy Duchin’s rise to fame, of the tragic death of his wife, and of Eddy’s own early death is told in “The Eddy

Duchin Story,” a Hollywood movie made in 1956. Peter Duchin, orphaned at fourteen when his father died, is a character in the movie, but Jason Duchin, who was born in 1966, is not. Averell Harriman and Marie Whitney Harriman, the rich and famous couple who helped raise Peter Duchin after his mother’s death, were waiting in the hallway at the hospital with sandwiches and vodka at the birth of Jason, Peter’s first child; in the previous decade, Averell had been the governor of New York. Thus Jason Duchin’s background—near the pointoh-one per cent, but never of it—helps him in his DreamYard fund-raising, an activity that takes up about half his time.

Lord and Duchin both went to Hotchkiss, the New England prep school, but knew each other only to say hello. After college—Brown and Duke, respectively—and after Lord received an M.F.A. from the American Conservatory Theatre, the two re-met in New York. One evening at a party, they began to talk about using theatre to teach kids and found they had been thinking along the same lines. Duchin was working for Boys’ Harbor, a nonprofit in East Harlem, and Lord joined him there. With a group of kids between the ages of eight and twelve, they put together a play about a place called the Dream Yard, a playground where dreams became real. They liked the name’s urban sound and hopeful connotations for their new organization, which they incorporated in 1994. Lord’s father helped them with the details of setting up a nonprofit and Duchin’s father’s orchestra played at DreamYard fund-raising benefits for years.

On the Saturday following this year’s benefit, Duchin and other DreamYard staffers gathered to do some heavy physical labor—moving paving stones, making sidewalk improvements—in and near Hayden Lord Park. For this job, they teamed up for the first time with a group from the Mission Continues, an organization that brings military veterans together for volunteer work. Aaron Scheinberg, the group’s leader, is the executive director of the Mission Continues for the Northeast. He graduated from West Point and was a platoon leader in Iraq. With Duchin and the others, he began carrying stones—“Just like humping sandbags in Iraq,” he said—to





a rented pickup. Talking nonprofit shop with Duchin, he mentioned his organization's fund-raising problems.

"Tell me about it, man," Duchin said, tossing paving stones into the pickup bed with a satisfying crash. "But there is a lot of money in New York. I mean: a lot. We just gave our annual fund-raiser dinner last Wednesday, and we had hedge-fund guys, wives of big C.E.O.s, at least three or four billionaires. Some of the rich people in New York can be really generous. Ethan Hawke and his wife hosted, and Caroline Kennedy was there, and Michael Strahan, the guy who played for the Giants. For entertainment, we had some DreamYard kids who performed a revue, and they were fabulous. What we were trying to say to the people from the Upper East Side or Riverdale or Greenwich, or wherever, was 'These are *your* kids.' And I think we succeeded with that. Donations and pledges were pretty good. A lot of these people get what we're doing."

The fund-raiser cost about a hundred and fifteen thousand dollars to put on and brought in a little more than a million. DreamYard's yearly budget is about four million. The city contributes a million, donations add another million, and grants make up the rest. While carrying stones, Duchin summed up this back-of-the-envelope annual report for the ex-Army captain in a couple of breaths. "We stay ahead of the game, but still, every year, it's friggin' hand-to-mouth," he said.

For a while, I helped with moving the paving stones, which were the rough-hewn kind that form the borders of sidewalk tree pits. Two at a time was my limit, but some of the vets could handle four or five. As they worked, they jawed back and forth about their different branches of the service. The day continued pleasantly, with the talk, the clatter of the stones, and breaks for donuts and coffee.

In midafternoon, I said goodbye and headed for home. I had left my car on Andrews, about a block from the park. When I got to it, I saw that an S.U.V. had double-parked, so I couldn't pull out. Cars were double-parked all along the street. A police car with flashing lights that I had noticed in the morning had not left, and its lights were still flashing. I walked over. It was in front of an apartment building at 1730 Andrews Avenue South. A black wreath

hung over the building's main door. To one side of it were flowers, candles, and photographs in memory of a twenty-three-year-old man named Joel Rivera, with his years of birth and death. He had been shot in the neck and killed on that spot eight days before. A sign in Spanish said that the wake would take place at an apartment in the building at three that afternoon.

I went back to my car. The S.U.V. blocking me had gone, but I waited a few minutes before leaving. The two policemen in the patrol car sat expressionless while more cars arrived. Women dressed in dark churchgoing clothes got out. Carrying lidded casseroles and platters covered in aluminum foil, they went into the building.

Every year has its own momentum, and for kids it builds as the end of school comes closer in an atmosphere of excitement and near-chaos. At the center, there were Skype poetry contests with student groups in France and Morocco and Japan, meetings to plan trips to look at colleges, preparation for art exhibitions. The Bronx Arts Festival, which DreamYard oversees every June, brought more than a thousand attendees—kids, teachers, parents, grandparents, siblings—to the campus of Lehman College, at East 198th Street. Over the festival's five days, kids performed in poetry slams and dance shows and scenes from plays and brought their families to look at their work on the walls of the college art museum. For the DreamYard teachers in the public schools, the festival was like a reunion. They stood in groups talking and showing each other photos on their phones. In out-of-the-way corners near the refreshment tables, stacks of empty pizza boxes rose to the height of a man.

On the final night, in the college's steeply pitched five-hundred-seat theatre, the audience seemed to loom around the kids onstage, applauding and giving shout-outs. Fifty kids in zombie makeup zombied to "Thriller," two middle-school actors did the scene in which Othello strangles Desdemona, a girl named Massire Camara recited a poem about the death of her uncle that is now on YouTube, and a stage full of elementary-age students in a step-dance group called the Bengal Tigers, from P.S. 55, did a routine with

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*"Your health crisis continues to unfold."*

stomping, clapping, and chanting that bounced the audience out of its seats. In mid-show, the whole place stood and sang the national anthem, a cappella.

The Bronx is the city's poorest borough, and the congressional district that covers much of it, including all of its southern part, is the poorest congressional district in the country. Sometimes groups go into communities and do arts programs and then leave. About twelve years ago, Lord and Duchin decided that DreamYard would make its headquarters in the Bronx, concentrate on the Bronx, and stay. Thirty-one per cent of the population in DreamYard's Zip Code is under the age of eighteen. The idea was to see what kind of programs the parents and kids there wanted. The hope is that some of the kids who go through DreamYard will attend college and return to the Bronx after finishing their educations.

Haydil Henriquez became a DreamYard kid in eighth grade. Though she was her class's valedictorian at Middle School 390, she got into none of the high schools she applied to. That news, given to her and twenty-six other unfortunate eighth graders by their middle-school principal during an assembly just for them, reduced her to tears. The next

part of the assembly, a presentation by Duchin and Lord and Rod Bowen, the incoming principal of DreamYard Prep, revived her. As they described the new high school that would open in the fall, she felt she had been rescued. She remembers how the circles of sweat under the men's arms grew on that hot May afternoon, and how Bowen's dreadlocks made shadows in the light from the projector. "That was the beginning of the journey I'm still on," she says.

She applied to DreamYard Prep, got in, and showed up early the first day, before any other student. Henriquez is a vivid young woman with dark eyes and wisps of brown hair around her face. She still has the expectant and hopeful look of that person who is the first one to show up.

"I was born in Manhattan because my parents didn't trust the hospitals in the Bronx," she told me one morning at the center. "They both came from the Dominican Republic, but they met here. They didn't really like the Bronx, but they never lived anywhere else. My father was a cabdriver and my mom works in restaurants, and I have three sisters, two older and one younger. When I was ten, we moved to the projects—the Melrose Houses, on East 153rd Street. Public housing had negative connotations

for my parents, but it was what they could afford. Because of their preconceived notions, they wouldn't let us kids do very much outside. I spent a lot of time staying alone and reading. I was really shy, but I got over that by being on the poetry-slam team in high school. I became almost a different person. I did literally every single extracurricular activity that was offered at DY Prep. It's almost embarrassing how much I loved my high school."

Duchin and Lord saw her at poetry competitions and other events, helped her with scholarship money for a summer exchange program, and, in return, asked her to be a student representative on DreamYard's board. When she was looking for colleges, Swarthmore's name came up. She had never heard of it, but a fellow board member who had gone there encouraged her application. She was accepted, with a substantial scholarship. She could not believe the campus, which appeared to her like a huge garden with labels on everything. The fact that Swarthmore was in a suburb of Philadelphia and just a three-hour drive away made the transition from home easier.

She graduated in 2014 with a major in education and psychology and a minor in Latin-American studies. By then, she had travelled in Italy, co-managed a counselling program that she had helped develop for teen-agers in Bogotá, Colombia, and thought she might work in agriculture and natural medicine in the Dominican Republic. In the end, she interviewed for a position with DreamYard.

"When they offered me a job running youth programs at the center, I decided to move back to the same apartment in the Melrose Houses that we moved to when I was ten," she said. "I wanted to be in my community again. Now I'm even in my old bedroom. My parents were more critical of the projects than they should have been, but it was also worse back then. There was a man on my floor who I was actually afraid of. And he's still there, in the same apartment. He used to be addicted to substances but now he's clean, trying to set a better example for his two sons who have become incarcerated. He and I get along now, say hello in the hallway. People see me when I go shopping and they recognize me and say, 'You graduated



high school, you graduated college, and you came *back*? I want to show the kids I work with that someone like themselves can make a good life here.”

A few months after I stopped hanging out at DreamYard, I saw that the Public Works production in the Park in September was going to be “The Odyssey,” again directed by Lear deBessonet. The last time I’d seen the Olivo family at the center, they told me that they all planned to try out for it, though they did not say the name of the play, because it was still a secret. Alizah had described the delicious waffles at the buffet backstage at “The Winter’s Tale,” and the raccoons that came out of the Park to eat from the theatre’s garbage cans, and how much fun she had staying up late. I knew she hoped to be in “Lear’s” next play.

I got tickets for Opening Night. Turning immediately to the program, I saw that it listed Alizah and all the rest of her family; they were playing citizens of Ithaca. When you know somebody in a play, you watch it differently from when you don’t. It’s like at a school play when the camera of every adult in the audience is pointing toward a different part of the stage. I watched the Olivos whenever they came on, but especially Alizah, easy to pick out because she was the smallest person on the stage. “The Odyssey” almost outdid “The Winter’s Tale” for color and tumult and crowd scenes, and having a few familiar people to track through it all gave a sense of purpose and contrast.

Toward the end, in the scene when Odysseus, who has finally returned home, throws off the rags disguising him as a beggar and reveals himself to his fellow-Ithacans, and they shout for joy, the professional actor playing him, Brandon Victor Dixon, went over to Alizah and lifted her up high. Seeing the complete happiness on her face at that moment, there under the lights and the sky and the stars and the helicopters, I felt a rush of affection for her and for the entire city of New York. This cross-binding love is the point of the city, the lashings and the bracings of it, and it’s the deep purpose of DreamYard. I understood that the kids are all our kids. Sitting a few rows in front of me, Jason Duchin looked even happier than I was. ♦

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# THE REFUGEE DILEMMA

*What do we owe those we take in?*

BY RACHEL AVIV

Nelson Kargbo was eleven years old when rebel soldiers attacked his village, Kamalo, in northern Sierra Leone. He was playing soccer on a dirt field at the edge of the village. When he saw houses on fire, he and his best friend, Foday, ran toward the jungle, following Foday's mother and dozens of other people. They walked until late at night, when they came across a cluster of abandoned mud houses. Foday's mother, who used to cook for the boys after their soccer games, told them to sleep under a grove of mango trees. "Tomorrow, we'll keep walking," she said. "We'll make it to the city."

The country's civil war, which had begun five years earlier, in 1991, had seemed remote to Kargbo. He'd considered it only when he overheard his adoptive father, Lennard, a pastor who had assumed custody of him when his parents died, talking about it with members of his congregation. Kargbo was the youngest child in the family—he had seven brothers and sisters, who were all the biological children of the pastor—and he was accustomed to being ignored. He was reserved and nearly invisible, except when he played soccer. He hoped to play for the national team.

At 3 A.M., he and the others were woken by soldiers from the Revolutionary United Front, an army that was fighting to overthrow the government. They carried trussed goats and bundles of food looted from Kargbo's village. The R.U.F. commander, a man in his early twenties called General Mosquito, told the boys and men to line up. Their mothers, wives, and daughters waited in another line. Mosquito asked the boy at the front of the line, who was Kargbo's classmate, if he wanted to join the rebels or return to his mother, and the boy said that he wanted to go home. Without saying a word, a soldier put a gun to the boy's head and killed him. When it was Kargbo's turn, he said that he

wanted to join the rebels. Foday said the same thing.

The soldiers then addressed the women, asking all but the elderly if they were ready to join. The first three women consented to be soldiers or "bush wives," cooking, cleaning, and having sex with the rebels. A young soldier approached Foday's mother, groped her breasts, and asked if she was a rebel now, too, but she pushed the man off her. The soldier shot her in the head, and said that he was setting an example. Foday fell to the ground crying. "Man up!" a soldier said, pulling him to his feet. "Stop whining like a little girl."

Kargbo, Foday, and the other recruits walked for two days, until they reached the rebels' base, an encampment of huts with pickup trucks parked nearby. The boys were given food, beer, cigarettes, and "brown brown," a mixture of cocaine and gunpowder that was injected into their forearms. Kargbo's adoptive father was a follower of the Methodist minister John Wesley, who viewed alcohol as poison. Kargbo felt that he had sinned by permitting alcohol and drugs into his body, but they made him aggressive and fearless, especially when the deputy commander, called Rambo, taught him how to operate an AK-47. He and the other boys practiced shooting at targets, as tapes featuring Tupac, Biggie Smalls, and Lucky Dube played from a boom box.

The commanders renamed Kargbo Fula Boy, because he was skinny and short, like children of the Fula tribe. (He is actually Temne, the country's largest ethnic group.) After a month of training, Kargbo began helping to loot villages. He and the other soldiers approached towns at night, wearing bulky coats that hid the weapons slung on their backs. The boys entered first, to draw gunfire, so that older soldiers would know where to shoot. Kargbo was often so high that he would shoot an entire

magazine of bullets, oblivious of whom he might be killing. The rebels had trained him to feel that he was superior to civilians. He told me, "They were just like chickens to me."

Kargbo never understood the reasons for the war. The rebel leaders didn't discuss politics, except to refer to their enemies as "bastards." Kargbo saw the attacks as merely a way to procure what the soldiers called "rations": stolen goods that they handed over to Mosquito. Kargbo came to respect Mosquito, who rarely spoke, which was Kargbo's natural tendency, too. Before battles, Mosquito motivated the soldiers by playing the Tupac song "Me Against the World." Kargbo, who slept with his AK-47, found solace in the lyrics: "witnessing killings/leaving dead bodies in abandoned buildings/can't reach the children cause they're illing/addicted to killing and the appeal from the cap peeling/without feeling." Kargbo knew the story of Tupac's life—he was murdered the same year that Kargbo was abducted—and viewed him as an idol who understood the inevitability of everyday violence, and the trauma of being both victim and perpetrator. Kargbo and Foday stole Tupac T-shirts from villages that they looted and wore them when they went into battle. "We were hyped from the brown brown, pumped up, ready to go," he told me. "At the time, I was into it—I was so into it."

When Kargbo and Foday were alone on night duty, guarding the camp, they spoke about their home, but stuck to quotidian details. Kargbo was afraid to mention Foday's mother. He had seen what happened to boys who showed their feelings. "I used to be an emotional person," he told me. "I used to cry." At night, he was given marijuana and whiskey, which helped him fall asleep. He never tried to escape, because those who did had their arms chopped off with machetes. He figured that he would stop





*Nelson Kargbo was a child soldier given asylum in America. But after he got in trouble Immigration decided to send him back.*

being a soldier when he died, a possibility about which he felt ambivalent.

In 1998, after Kargbo had been with the rebels for nearly three years, he contracted malaria. On the way to a village on the border of Sierra Leone and Guinea, where the older soldiers said that there would be cows to steal, Kargbo was too sick to aim his gun from the back of the pickup truck. When the rebels passed close to Kamalo, Kargbo's village, Mosquito stopped the truck and told Kargbo to get out. Kargbo wasn't sure if Mosquito was being cruel to him, since he'd become useless as a fighter, or merciful. He was left at a roundabout without weapons or food.

Later that day, a member of his father's congregation recognized him and took him back to Kamalo. His family, like many residents, had fled the afternoon that he was abducted, and were now living in a refugee camp in Conakry, Guinea. When they learned that Kargbo was alive, they sent money for the trip to the camp. On his way, Kargbo travelled first to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, where he saw graffiti of Tupac lyrics and imagery, much of it scrawled by an R.U.F. splinter faction, the West Side Boys, whose name referred to Tupac's allegiance to rappers on the West Coast.

In Guinea, Lennard Kargbo was dismayed by his adoptive son's newfound irreverence. "He had been such a good boy," Lennard told me. "I didn't know what had happened to him. He became a bad example." Kargbo went through withdrawal from the drugs and became unhinged, yelling and swearing at people. Rather than playing soccer with the other kids in his compound, he stayed inside, watching Guinean music videos on a small television.

Kargbo spoke of his experiences only in generalities. "It was too painful for him," his oldest brother, Eli, said. "When I'd ask him about his abduction, he would say, 'Well, brother, you know there's not so much that I can explain.'" Eli thought that Kargbo's silence was a "survival skill, but he kept surviving that way. I think he still thought that if he talked about how he felt something bad would happen to him."

The family had applied for refugee

status in the United States, and a year after they arrived at the camp the application was accepted. They left for Minnesota, where there are roughly a hundred thousand refugees, many attracted by the state's social services and high rate of immigrant employment. Kargbo had imagined that all the young men in America would exude Tupac's style and confidence. He told me that the other kids in the refugee camp assured him that "now it will be a good, easy life—you'll become whatever you want to become."



The first political refugees to settle in Minnesota came from Southeast Asia. In the late seventies and the eighties, they fled from conflicts in Vietnam and

Cambodia and Laos, many having witnessed the murder of relatives and the destruction of their communities. Doctors observed that many Southeast Asians complained of stomach aches, dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath, and pains in their joints that didn't correspond to physical injuries. Jerome Kroll, the chief psychiatrist of the Refugee Mental Health Program at the Community-University Health Care Center, in Minneapolis, said that the refugees often expressed their emotional distress in somatic terms, locating their suffering in their bodies, not in their minds. They were taking extraordinary amounts of Tylenol and Advil. The concept of post-traumatic stress disorder struck them as irrelevant, a Western invention. When Kroll asked them what was wrong, they touched their chests, their abdomens, their knees, their shoulders.

Beginning in the early two-thousands, the clinic began treating a new population of refugees. They came from Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, and other nations in Africa, to escape civil wars and armed conflicts, which involved more than a hundred thousand child soldiers each year. The proliferation of light weapons in Africa had suddenly made children effective as fighters, and they returned from the wars having missed crucial stages in their psychological development: they tended to be easily provoked, and prone to dissociative states, a coping mechanism that had once allowed them to be calm in the face of extreme violence.

Kroll said that the African refugees

were often brought to the clinic by family members, because the patients didn't think that there was anything wrong with their minds. But they had begun to run into the street in the middle of the night, or pace naked around their houses. Many of these patients acknowledged that they'd experienced violence in their native countries but denied that there were emotional repercussions. When Kroll asked what had happened when militias invaded their neighborhoods, they would often respond, "Nothing much." Upon further questioning, they would reveal that family members had been shot in front of them. To complain was to suggest that they expected life to be anything but hard. Taking psychiatric medications meant announcing to their communities that they were crazy and damaged, a stigma that would contaminate their families. Kroll began minimizing his use of medical terms. He told patients that their symptoms were a "normal response to an abnormal situation."

When Kargbo arrived in Minnesota, he was fifteen years old, and he dealt with trauma the same way that he had with the rebels: he avoided reminders of what he had lost. He was stoic and taciturn. All he wanted to do was play soccer. His high school, in St. Paul, seemed to him almost fanciful—there was free food and books, and the teachers never whipped students who were late or failed tests—yet he was unable to sit still in the classroom. In Kamalo, where the students spent the afternoons helping the teachers grow cassava leaves, to support the school, he had reached only the fifth grade. The first novel he had ever read was assigned to him by his ninth-grade English teacher. The sentences were too complex and he was uninterested in the characters, many of whom were preoccupied with choosing which rich man to marry. It was the first time that Kargbo had ever been surrounded by white people, and he thought that they had "a bad vibe about black people." Students made fun of his accent, and he would sometimes respond by grabbing or pushing them. His first American friend smoked pot all the time. "That right there got me," he told me.

His brother Eli worried that Kargbo was assimilating the worst part of American culture. "Nelson used to be a very sweet and quiet boy, but he had clicked



with the bad guys in the war, and he was still attracted to the bad guys, the troublemakers," he said. "He couldn't get out of fighting mode and become a normal person again."

Like many former child soldiers, Kargbo felt that his family saw him as irreparably damaged. His parents yelled at him when he broke his ten-o'clock curfew, sneaking in through the basement window. "I just tried to rehabilitate myself by doing what my friends were doing, smoking weed and drinking," Kargbo said. When the war entered his mind, he smoked more and tried to fall asleep. Sometimes he tried to convince himself that he had never killed anyone—that his bullets could have missed all their targets. At other moments, he guessed that he had killed between ten and a hundred people.

Kargbo's nightmares shook him so deeply that, after waking up from one, he would get out of bed and start his day, even if it was 3 A.M., so as not to risk a return to his unconscious. It never occurred to him to see a doctor. He had hated visiting people in the hospital near Kamalo, which smelled like infected flesh, and he associated doctors with that stench. When he had a fever, he ate pepper soup.

When Kargbo was in the eleventh grade, his parents told him that he could no longer live at home if he continued to smoke and drink. He moved out, slept on friends' couches, and eventually dropped out of high school. He began working at a Burger King. Within a few months, he started hearing a deep, adult voice that insulted him in Krio, the language he spoke growing up. The voice told him, "You are good for nothing," and "You are a piece of shit"—the same things that Mosquito and the other commanders used to say when Kargbo didn't follow their orders. Once, while he was in a friend's car, the voice commanded him to get out. He opened the door and jumped from the moving vehicle, bruising his shoulders when he tumbled onto the road.

When Kargbo was nineteen, he became a permanent resident of the United States; he could work without restriction and in five years, if he demonstrated "good moral character," he could become a U.S. citizen. He enrolled in Job Corps, hoping to become a nurse's assistant, and began dating Sarah Hemmingson, a white eighteen-year-old whom he met

through his friends. She liked that he was understated and funny and didn't try to impress her. "He wore clothes that were too small and wrong for the weather and made him look homeless," she told me. When she asked him why he had so many scars on his chest, he refused to tell her, saying that he had been instructed by older soldiers, "If you talk about what you've done, you will grow big, like a balloon, until you blow up." He never elaborated. "I don't know if it was a myth or witchcraft or what, but I stopped asking," she said.

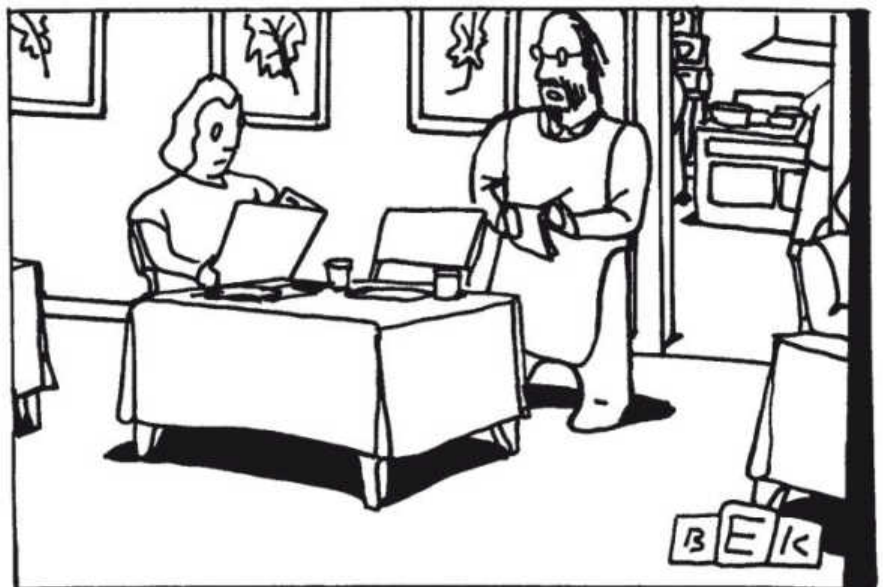
Not long after they began dating, Hemmingson became pregnant. They named their daughter Destanee. Kargbo was excited to be a father, but Hemmingson felt that "his head was up in the clouds and he wasn't in reality." Tupac was his model of how to be an accomplished black man in America, and he spent hours listening to "All Eyez on Me." Hemmingson said that her parents often belittled his prospects for success. "My family was never O.K. with me dating a black man," she said.

Kargbo continued to smoke marijuana and drink heavily. He was arrested for a series of misdemeanors, serving no more than a few days in jail for each crime: disorderly conduct, being a public nuisance, fleeing a peace officer, shoplifting, and possession of burglary tools—he'd acted as a lookout, according to the police, while a friend tried to break into a store.

In 2006, when he was twenty-one, he

was arrested for "terroristic threats," a crime that in Minnesota encompasses behavior committed "with purpose to terrorize another or to cause evacuation of a building . . . or otherwise to cause serious public inconvenience." The boyfriend of Hemmingson's cousin had called Kargbo a nigger in front of Destanee. The two men began wrestling, and Kargbo, who weighed a hundred and twenty-two pounds, found himself in a choke hold, pinned to the ground. "My cousin's boyfriend kept saying, 'Oh, you want to be a man?'" Hemmingson said. As soon as Kargbo was released, he ran to his car and grabbed a crowbar and a hammer. "Back away from me," he said, throwing the hammer on the ground. The police were called, and he was taken to jail, where he tried to hang himself with a torn blanket. He pleaded guilty (through an Alford plea, he maintained that he was innocent) and entered a work-release program for low-risk offenders. Hemmingson, who broke up with him a year later, told me, "He tried to brush off his experiences from the war and start over, but whenever there was a possible threat he was still trying to make a point that he's not scared of people, no matter how big they are."

When Kargbo describes his life in America, it falls into two halves: before and after the Fords. At twenty-three, he fell in love with Marquette Ford, one of the few black people who



*"Would you like an earnest tone with your lentils?"*

lived in his neighborhood, and eventually moved into her mother's home in Woodbury, a suburb of St. Paul. "His group of friends were horrible, and I took him right out of that house where he was living and introduced him to a different type of family," Marquette told me. He dropped the rapping dream and took a job at a company that manufactured banners and signs. Marquette's mother, Renee, a customer-service representative at the Minnesota Department of Health, sensed that Kargbo was looking for a family. She found him "respectful and shy and a hard worker," she said. Having raised her children in white, suburban neighborhoods, she related to Kargbo's sense of alienation. "I know how it feels to have your black ass smack in the middle of all these Caucasians," she told me. She was especially impressed by Kargbo's devotion to her daughter, who, she explained fondly, had the "worst attitude."

Marquette and Kargbo had three children in four years and moved into a house across the street from Renee. Most people from his village had large families, and it felt natural and comforting to do the same. He stopped socializing, unless his friends came to his house, where he was always watching the children. He worked night shifts, taking care of them during the day. "He chose to be Mr. Mom," Renee said. "He did the cooking, because Marquette doesn't cook, and he did the cleaning, because Marquette doesn't like to clean." Destanee visited on the weekends, and Kargbo took all four children to the library and taught the older ones to play soccer.

Marquette, who liked to go to parties, would occasionally disappear for days at a time. "It was like she didn't respect Nelson the way he deserved to be respected," Renee told me. "I'd be like 'Nelson, let Marquette do some work.' But he wouldn't dare let her do it. She kept walking all over him." At times, Nelson's anger was so overwhelming that he'd suddenly appear lost and distracted, as if he had forgotten where he was. Renee encouraged him to come over to her house with the children whenever he and Marquette fought. "I considered him my son," she told me.

In August, 2013, when Kargbo was twenty-eight and his younger son was a year old, Marquette stayed out past the

## VISITATION OF THE DOVE

Night is at hand already: it is well  
That we yield to the night. So Homer sings,  
As if there were no Heaven and no Hell,  
But only peace.  
The gray dove comes down in a storm of wings  
Into my garden where seeds never cease

To be supplied as if life fits a plan  
Where needs are catered to. One need is not:  
I do not wish to leave yet. If I can  
I will stay on  
And see another autumn, having got  
This far with all my strength not yet quite gone.

When Phèdre, dying, says that she can see  
Already not much more than through a cloud,  
She adds that death has taken clarity  
Out of her eyes  
To give it to the world. Behold my shroud:  
This brilliance in the garden. The dove flies,

And as it lifts away I start these last  
Few lines, for I know that my song must end.  
It will be done, and go back to the past,  
But I wish still  
To be here watching when the leaves descend.  
I might yield then, perhaps. But not until.

—Clive James

children's bedtime without telling him where she was. When Kargbo called her cell phone, it was answered by a man he didn't know. When she returned home, they got into a physical fight. Marquette's friend, who dropped her off, called the police and Kargbo was arrested for misdemeanor domestic assault. He spent six days in jail, waiting for his bond to be set. He didn't understand why it was taking so long. On August 29th, a corrections officer told him, "ICE put a hold on you." Kargbo replied, "Who's ICE?"

It had been seven years since Kargbo was arrested for terroristic threats, and during that time Immigration and Customs Enforcement had expanded its system for screening foreign nationals held in jail, accelerating their deportation by more than a hundred per cent. The Obama Administration has removed more than two million people from the country—more than any other President. Kargbo had escaped notice on his

previous arrest, but this time his name drew a "hit." ICE had determined that he could be deported, because his record showed convictions for shoplifting, possession of burglary tools, and terroristic threats. These offenses were classified as crimes of moral turpitude, an amorphous category that includes dozens of crimes, from perjury to prostitution. Moral turpitude has been defined by the courts as behavior that is "inherently base, vile, or depraved, and contrary to the accepted rules of morality."

Kargbo was transferred to Carver County Jail, one of several Minnesota institutions that have a contract with ICE. He wasn't given the opportunity to post bail. The passage of two laws in 1996, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, allowed the government to detain non-citizens without a bond hearing and to deport them for a number of violations,



including moral turpitude. The laws restricted judges' discretion to consider the ties that immigrants, including refugees here legally, had formed in the country, and the hardship that deportation would impose on their families. The bills were drafted after the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings, during a wave of fear about crime and terrorism, and President Clinton signed the first one with misgivings. He said that the law "makes a number of major, ill-advised changes in our immigration laws," warning that its "provisions eliminate most remedial relief for long-term legal residents." In the next ten years, the deportation of legal permanent residents left some hundred thousand American children without a parent.

Kargbo was so ashamed and confused by the idea of being deported—he didn't realize that it was possible, since he had a green card—that he never called home to explain what had happened. Renee expected that he would be out of jail within a day or two, and that, she said, "he'd sit on my couch and we'd pick each other up and dust each other off."

In Sierra Leone, it is often said that female child soldiers grow up to be prostitutes, having lost their sexual purity, and that male soldiers dominate the *okada* industry, a motorbike taxi service, one of the cheapest forms of transportation. Theresa Betancourt, a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health, said that many of the *okada* drivers are dismissed as crazy and dangerous. Betancourt has been following war-exposed youth in Sierra Leone and has found that child soldiers endured new forms of trauma once the violence ended. Some returned to communities that performed cleansing and atonement ceremonies, but others were blamed for their brutal deeds, and continued to do drugs. The latter group often became hostile, aggressive, and anxious; their inability to reënter their community as equals, she said, could serve as a reminder of their unresolved guilt and remorse.

Sarah Sherman-Stokes, of the Immigrants' Rights Clinic at the Boston University School of Law, told me that she sees a similar dynamic in the U.S. The refugees she represents tend to respond to "any threats to their well-being or personal safety in a really dispro-

portionate way. It has to be—that's the only way they made it this far." She added, "Their bad acts, which are often fuelled by substance abuse, tend to be responses to untreated, protracted complex trauma. And then we send them back to the place where the trauma was inflicted."

In response to the Syrian-refugee crisis, the Obama Administration has promised to increase the number of refugees it resettles, from seventy thousand a year to a hundred thousand. The Department of State gives preference to the most vulnerable refugees, who have been tortured or persecuted at home. Their traumas will inevitably follow them here. Studies show that migration, especially when coupled with discrimination, elevates people's risk of psychosis. An analysis of more than four million medical records in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that immigrants from East Africa and Southeast Asia were nearly twice as likely to develop psychosis as the general population was.

Within the immigration system, the link among crime, mental illness, and trauma is largely ignored. Heidi Altman, the legal director of the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition, in Washington, D.C., told me, "In recent years, we've seen this trend of people who survived the big civil wars of the nineties—Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone—come to the U.S. as refugees, and now, many years later, are struggling with the traumas they endured." Immigration detention, she said, is even less suited for the mentally ill than are jails and prisons, which have become the default provider for Americans who need psychiatric care. "In the criminal justice system, at least there is some acknowledgment that jails are functioning as de-facto psychiatric facilities," she said. "But that conversation isn't even happening on the immigration side."

Until 2011, the immigration system had no guidelines for dealing with people who were mentally impaired or incompetent, and they routinely appeared in court without lawyers. In the past few years, in response to a class-action suit, California, Arizona, and Washington, along with some cities, have begun providing government-appointed counsel for the mentally incompetent. But in

most parts of the country these people must either find a lawyer on their own or, like eighty-four per cent of detained migrants, represent themselves. Immigration law is notoriously complex; to understand it, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals has written, "Morsels of comprehension must be pried from mol-lusks of jargon."

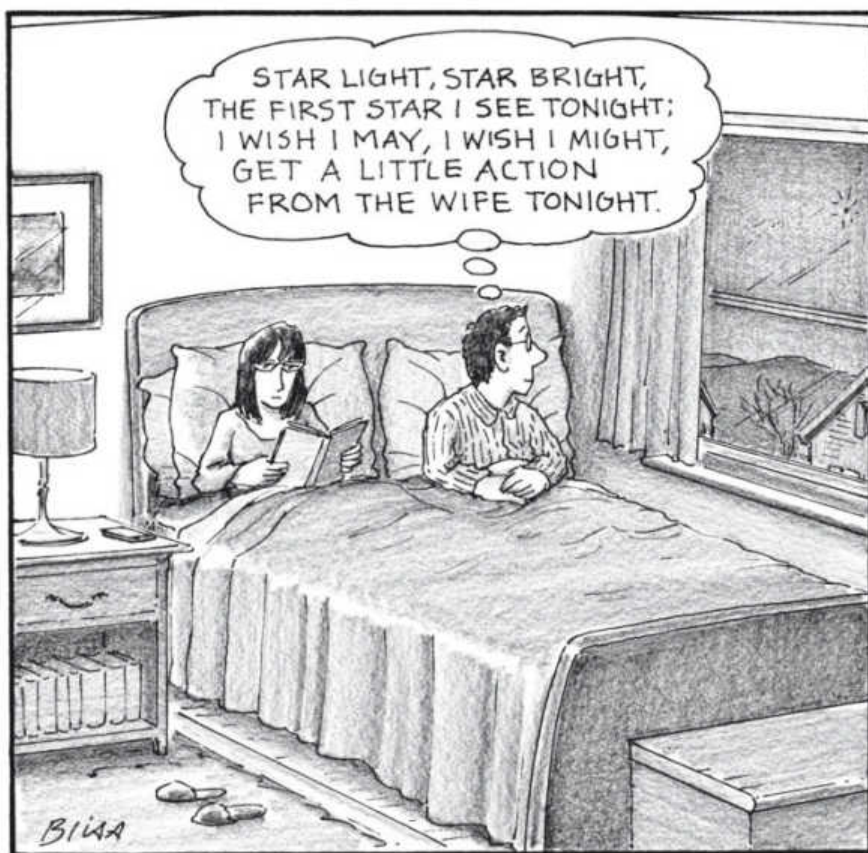
A few weeks after Kargbo's arrest, at his first hearing, in a courthouse in Bloomington, Minnesota, he heard a voice telling him to give up, because he wasn't going to win his case, no matter how hard he tried. He was so distraught that he told the judge he wanted to return to Sierra Leone. At the next hearing, the judge said, "I'm going to have to order you removed back to Sierra Leone. . . . You told me you had no fears of returning back to—"

"I was just mad, sir," Kargbo interrupted. "That was my daughter's birthday, and everything was emotional." He wore an orange jumpsuit, and his wrists and ankles were shackled. "I was confused—I didn't even know what was going on," he told the judge later. "My mind wasn't thinking straight."

The judge scheduled another hearing in two weeks, to give Kargbo time to compile evidence: because the classification of his crimes made him automatically deportable, the only way he could stay in the country was to prove that he would be threatened or tortured in Sierra Leone. The government's lawyer argued that Kargbo's concerns about persecution were outdated. Kargbo couldn't refute the government's position, because he had no access to the Internet and was unable to do research from jail. He tried to obtain pro-bono representation, to no avail. When Kargbo learned that he'd have to represent himself, he began to cry.

At the next hearing, in November, a different judge told him, "O.K., sir, I've ordered you deported."

"I wish to appeal this one, Your Honor," Kargbo said. "I'm not going to Sierra Leone. You can either send me to Liberia or somewhere else." He had never been to Liberia and knew no one there, but it was the first country that came to mind. He told the judge that he didn't think he could survive for two months in Sierra Leone. "This is my life,



Your Honor,” he said. “I’ve got kids in America.”

“We’re going to be done with your case for today,” the judge said.

“He’s playing with my life right here,” Kargbo went on, referring to the government’s lawyer. “He’s playing with my kids’ lives.”

Kargbo wrote an appeal, modelling it on that of his cellmate, a young man from Sudan who was also fighting deportation. “Till this day I’m still having nightmares,” Kargbo wrote. “I was just a kid; the responder never mean to hurt nobody, but his life was on the line one way if the responder doesn’t do what the leader he was going to get kill.” Referring to himself in the third person, Kargbo explained that he had no family in Sierra Leone and was afraid of the country’s leadership. “If the Sierra Leone government get a whole of him who is going to let his family know?” he wrote.

Kargbo worried that his younger son, Ka’marion, who was learning to walk when he was arrested, would forget who his father was. On the phone, Kargbo told Ka’marion that he loved and missed

him, but he wasn’t sure if his voice had triggered his son’s memory. “I just hope his older sister shows him my picture,” Kargbo said. His oldest child, Destanee, didn’t understand why he’d been gone for so long and begged him to come home. “So what are you doing?” she wrote him in a letter. “I really miss playing with you.”

Marquette, who was now responsible for her three children, lost her job, at a Goodwill store, because she couldn’t afford a babysitter. “Nelson was there for them more than I was,” she told me when I visited her at her new, subsidized house, which she hadn’t had time to furnish. “They listened to him more,” she said, sitting cross-legged on the living-room floor. “My voice wasn’t strong enough, or I just never followed through.” Marquette has an intimate way of talking about her flaws; she sits close to people, casually touching them, sharing her anxieties in a confessional tone.

When I met Kargbo for the first time, in jail, he talked about his experiences as if he hadn’t been present for them. If I confused events in his life and asked him a question that was fundamentally wrong, he let the facts stand uncorrected. He

seemed to become stiffer the closer the conversation came toward the subject of himself. The idea that he had a “story” to tell appeared to strike him as unseemly, as if the details could reactivate the past—an attitude that hurt him during his legal proceedings. He answered the judges’ questions with as few words as possible, the register of his voice barely changing. The numbness with which he described traumatic experiences made him appear as if he were bored by the memories.

Even when his nightmares woke Marquette in the middle of the night, because he was thrashing around in bed, he wouldn’t recount his dreams. Marquette knew that he didn’t like to discuss the war, but she didn’t know why. “I think it’s something with a secret society?” she told me. “I don’t even get it, but in the war I think they said he’s not supposed to tell anybody what happened.”

The only person Kargbo had felt comfortable opening up to was Renee. Kargbo called her routinely from jail and assured her, “I’ll be O.K., Mom.” She didn’t believe him. “He isn’t O.K., because I know his fears,” she said.

The staff at the jail initially wrote that they found Kargbo “pleasant,” “sociable,” and “personable.” But a few days after the judge ordered him deported Kargbo heard voices in Krio that told him, “You don’t deserve to live here,” and “You’re not capable—you’re not worth it.” He covered his ears. He worried that other inmates would think he was crazy if they saw him responding to the voices, so he walked away in order to conduct his conversations in private. It occurred to him that he looked like the Craze Men, as they were called, whom he used to see in his village, gesticulating and talking to themselves. Kids threw rocks at them and beat them with sticks. Some were chained to trees by their families, so that they wouldn’t run away or cause trouble. In his cell, Kargbo told the voices, “Leave me alone, leave me alone,” and then prayed to God to help. When that didn’t work, he imagined that the best way to quiet the voices was to bust his head open. He repeatedly banged his head against the wall.

Inmates on his unit heard him crying and yelling in his cell, and suggested that he take medication. “I need to see the nurse,” he finally wrote on a request slip



that he gave to a guard, but a medical consultation wasn't provided. He felt that he was being "targeted" by another inmate, who kept walking near him and farting. One day in late December, the inmate followed Kargbo to the jail's meal cart and asked him if he was ready to fight. Jail officials determined that Kargbo "took an aggressive stance," with "his chest protruding," and pushed the man. Kargbo was placed in solitary confinement for twenty-three hours a day; his meals were delivered to him through a slot in the door.

Two weeks later, guards found him lying on the concrete floor, singing loudly. When asked what he was doing, he explained that he was singing to the floor. "I can't take this," he told a nurse. He said that he was overwhelmed by the idea of returning to Sierra Leone and was "hearing voices telling me to hurt myself as the only out." A nurse evaluated him and gave him a handful of diagnoses: post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression. He was prescribed two antipsychotic drugs, a mood stabilizer, and pills to prevent him from having nightmares. The nurse wrote, "He says he tends to get in a fight if he is stressed out. This has been happening since he has been in high school."

After a month in solitary confinement, Kargbo was placed in protective custody, in Sherburne County Jail, the state's largest facility for immigrant detainees. He was dressed in a "suicide jacket," which restricted his movement, and he wasn't allowed to leave his cell except to shower and to exercise, for an hour each day. Kargbo said that there were four other "mental people" on the unit with him, and a man who had been arrested for murder. He and other ICE detainees were given the same treatment as criminal inmates.

In February, after Kargbo had spent half a year in detention, a nurse found him hiding under his bed. He had hallucinated that his cell was being attacked by a three-headed demon with a tail. The nurse described him as extremely withdrawn, but noted, "He has four children and the thought of them gives him hope to carry on."

By the spring of 2014, Kargbo was contemplating telling the judge to send him to Sierra Leone. He figured that he would return to his village and live on the streets. "I'll probably be home-

less," he told me, "but at least I can call my kids and talk to them whenever I want." Although the Board of Immigration Appeals had granted Kargbo's appeal, agreeing that his status as a child soldier had not been sufficiently considered, he had to wait in jail for three months before his case would be heard again. When I asked him how he would prepare for the hearings, he seemed confused. "How would I prepare?" he said. "I just wake up in the morning and see what they're going to say."

The immigration-court system has a backlog of nearly half a million deportation cases, even though hearings tend to be brisk. One immigration judge compared the situation to "holding death-penalty cases in traffic court." Although it costs more than a hundred and twenty dollars a day to house a detainee, the Department of Homeland Security places little priority on alternatives to detention, an approach encouraged by the agency's funding. To compel the Obama Administration to enforce immigration laws, Congress introduced an amendment to the 2010 budget mandating that the D.H.S. fill a quota of more than thirty-three thousand beds each day—thirteen thousand more than it had on an average day the previous year. A similar requirement has been included in each subsequent budget, making the D.H.S. the only U.S. law-enforcement agency that must detain a certain number of people. In 2013, John Morton, then the



director of ICE, told the House Judiciary Committee, "We do our very best not to have empty beds," explaining that "obviously, if Congress appropriates us money, we need to make sure that we are spending it on what it was appropriated for."

Kargbo had been in jail for nine months when he learned that Linus Chan, a lawyer with the University of Minnesota's Detainee Rights Clinic, was willing to take his case. One of the judges presiding over the case had expressed

concern about Kargbo's mental health and asked the government's lawyer to check if there were any available attorneys who would work for free. When Chan met Kargbo, he found him dejected and lifeless. He had stopped hearing voices since he began taking the antipsychotics, but he had a blank gaze and spoke in a monotone; he had also gained sixty pounds. The drugs had altered the way his body metabolized glucose, which eventually led to diabetes.

At Chan's request, Kroll, the psychiatrist at the Community-University Health Care Center, evaluated Kargbo, who answered his questions obediently and without emotion. Kroll said that it was clear that Kargbo's time in solitary confinement had exacerbated a predisposition to psychosis. "You are putting someone who has been a child captive in an environment that evokes all the memories of being at the mercy of others, of having his life controlled," he said. "Most people in isolation lose sight of the boundary between what is real and their imagination, but this is a young man who already had trouble telling reality from fantasy. This was probably the final straw."

Kroll wasn't certain that Kargbo had schizophrenia; he displayed paranoia, but his suspicions seemed natural, considering that he was incarcerated with violent strangers. Kroll, who recommended that Kargbo's medications be reduced, said that it was impossible to disentangle the schizophrenia process from his experiences in the war, his childhood drug use, and the trauma of his indefinite detention. Refugees often resist psychiatric drugs, maintaining that their distress is a social consequence of war, not a pathology. When Kroll gives presentations to staff at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services about the mental-health needs of refugees, he shows a slide that says, "Citizenship is better than Prozac."

At Kargbo's next hearing, in June, 2014, he said he was afraid that he would be chained and beaten in Sierra Leone, where psychosis is commonly treated as a curse. When he described his memories of the treatment of Craze Men in his village, he began sentences without finishing them; his syntax was fractured, his tone flat. When the judge asked him what his voices said to him, he responded, "That's

why I was fighting myself. It said, you know what I mean: let me just hurt myself. I don't deserve to live at this time."

The judge again ordered him deported, and the Board of Immigration Appeals affirmed the decision seven months later. Whenever Kargbo heard the guards' footsteps at unexpected times, he grew anxious. "I was just waiting for them to knock on my door and say, 'Pack up,'" he said. Although Ebola was widespread in Sierra Leone, people were still being sent back.

In April, 2015, nine months after the deportation order, Kargbo was put into a van and driven to Idaho. After a few nights in jail, he was sent by bus to Nebraska, where he boarded a chartered flight along with men from Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and Mexico. Their limbs were shackled throughout the flight. The plane stopped in Louisiana, to pick up more detainees, then landed in Pennsylvania. Kargbo and several other men from Sierra Leone were confined in the York County Prison, where they all had appointments with officials from the Sierra Leonean consulate, which had to issue travel documents for them. The detainees tried to cheer each other up. Kargbo said that one man told everyone, "They're not deporting us—we're not going anywhere!"

On the second day of interviews, Kargbo was called into a conference room by two men in suits, who asked him if he wanted to live in Sierra Leone. He told them he was afraid of returning to the country—he hadn't spoken to anyone there since he was fourteen—and that he couldn't live apart from his four children. Kargbo recalled, "They were giving me some looks, like 'You're a bad kid.'"

Kargbo was returned to jail in Minnesota, where he continued to wait. A month later, a colleague of Chan's from the University of Minnesota, Katherine Evans, filed a habeas petition, asserting that Kargbo's detention for nearly two years without a bond hearing was a violation of due process. The government had kept Kargbo incarcerated without ever determining if he was a flight risk or a danger to his community—a predicament common to tens of thousands of detainees each year. In 2003, the Supreme Court held that legal permanent

residents could be detained without a bond hearing for an unspecified "brief period."

The Board of Immigration Appeals sent the case back to court for a review, in response to a last-ditch motion to reopen it. At a hearing in July, Kargbo's lawyers argued that deportation would lead to conditions resembling torture—a claim that has been made in recent years by mentally ill immigrants fighting deportation to Haiti, Liberia, Somalia, Ghana, Sudan, and Jamaica, among other countries. Kargbo's lawyers drew from a 2014 case concerning a bipolar man, Tumaini Temu, who had been arrested in Washington, D.C. He had previously been hospitalized in Tanzania after walking into traffic and trying to prevent car accidents with his hands. Hospital orderlies beat him with clubs and leather straps, bound his hands with rope for up to eight hours a day, and referred to him as *mwenda wazimu*, a Swahili term that means "demon-possessed." Because psychiatric medications in Tanzania are scarce, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals found that bipolar Tanzanians qualified as a persecuted social group, writing that "Mr. Temu's membership in his proposed group is not something he has the power to change." His deportation was cancelled.

Kargbo's lawyers argued that the Craze Men were treated like Tanzania's *mwenda wazimu*. Patients who were admitted to the country's only psychiatric hospital, known as Kissy Mental, in Freetown—a dilapidated structure that was destroyed by rebels in the civil war and only partly reconstructed—were chained to their beds. A 2013 Human Rights Commission report found that some nurses assigned to Kissy Mental refused to go to work, because of the stigma associated with the hospital.

Ayana Jordan, a psychiatry fellow at Yale who studies mental health in Sierra Leone, told the judge that if Kargbo were deported he would likely have another psychotic episode. "He'd be highly stigmatized, seen as abnormal, feared, shunned, chased out of town," she said. Jordan said that during her visits to Sierra Leone people told her that mental illness could be "caught" when a cool breeze entered the room while someone was sleeping, through witchcraft and bad dreams, and by bathing at the wrong hour.

In her visits to the Kono District, a region devastated by the war, she discovered that many former child soldiers were relegated to an area known as the Bronx, a derelict open-air ghetto, where they continued to use brown brown. People told her, "If you want to see the Craze Men, go to the Bronx."

The country's only psychiatrist, Edward Nahim, who recently retired, wrote a letter to Kargbo's judge explaining, "We must use chains to restrain patients to their beds so they cannot escape." He said that many patients at Kissy Mental went untreated, owing to shortages in medication, and when released they "roam around the streets aimlessly, though they are not welcomed there. Other people laugh at them, tease them, beat them up, and throw stones at them."

At the end of the hearing, the judge found that the conditions for the mentally ill in Sierra Leone violated the United Nations Convention Against Torture, and deferred Kargbo's removal. But she placed him in a kind of legal limbo, ordering him expelled from the United States. The government had to find another country that would take him. Kargbo was sent back to jail.

A few weeks later, according to Kargbo, his deportation officer asked him where his refugee papers had been processed. When he said that he'd been in a refugee camp in Guinea, the deportation officer told him that he would look into sending him there.

Kargbo's lawyers filed another habeas petition, arguing that his ongoing detention had come to seem punitive, since it was improbable that he would be deported anywhere. On October 2nd, two months after the hearing, a magistrate judge recommended that the petition be granted, noting that there was no evidence that the D.H.S. had made any attempts to find a new country that would accept Kargbo.

A week later, a guard woke Kargbo at 6:30 A.M. He had fifteen minutes to get dressed, pack, and leave the jail. He put on the same jeans and T-shirt he'd worn when he was arrested. He'd lost some weight, after his medications had been reduced, but his clothes were still too tight. His Liberian cellmate, who was fighting his deportation without a lawyer, congratulated him and went back to sleep.



Kargbo's lawyer, Katherine Evans, drove him to Renee's house. He waited at the front door with a paper bag containing all the belongings he'd accumulated in the past twenty-six months: his legal papers, a Bible that he'd received in a Bible-studies class, and some songs he had written on notebook paper about his love for Marquette. Now she had a new boyfriend, and had decided that the relationship was over, but Kargbo still hoped, he said, that "we can patch things up."

Renee screamed when she saw Kargbo at the door. "Coming, coming, coming!" she said, as she ran down the stairs from the second floor. Kargbo pushed open the door, and they held each other, jumping up and down and then rocking back and forth. She touched his dreadlocks, which had grown to his chin, and his cheeks and then rubbed his stomach. "Ah! He's got a gut," she said, clapping. "Oh, my God, he is so chunky!" Her forty-sixth birthday was in two days, and she told him that she expected him to cook rice and chicken, his best dish. "Best birthday present ever," she said.

Renee drove Kargbo to his children's day-care center and hid him behind her, so that the children would be surprised. Renee assumed that Trinity, a wiry, buoyant seven-year-old, would make a scene—she used to sob after phone calls with Kargbo—but she told her younger brothers, impassively, "That's Dad." Kargbo's older son, Cay'vion, who had just turned five, wrapped his arms around Kargbo's neck and shouted, "Uncle!"

"Uncle?" Kargbo asked.

Cay'vion quickly corrected himself. For the rest of the day, whenever his brother or sister did anything that could be perceived as disturbing Kargbo, he shouted, "Leave my dad alone."

Kargbo moved into Renee's house, sleeping on an inflatable mattress in the living room, under a tapestry of John F. Kennedy. Renee wished she had a basement so that Kargbo could live there permanently; then the children could sleep over every night. She preferred that Kargbo live in her house. "Only because then he won't feel alone," Renee said. "I don't want him to ever feel like his family's not here."

Within days, Renee realized that

Kargbo wasn't acting the way that she remembered. She kept asking him to cook his rice-and-chicken dish. "I don't even think Nellie remembers the damn rice!" she told me, three weeks after he'd returned home. We were sitting on a large brown couch in the living room, Renee at one end and Kargbo at the other, his body tilted away from us. "Every time I mention the rice, he has a puzzled look on his face. It's like his mind is blank."

Kargbo had spent the past hour calling different pharmacies to try to refill his diabetes medication. He had only one pill left. Because he had lost his status as a refugee, he was no longer eligible for Medicaid, and he didn't know how he would pay for his medications. He wanted to return to his job at the signage company, but he had to wait at least three months to get a work permit, since his green card had been revoked. The misdemeanor domestic-assault charge was looming, too. Marquette had asked that the charge be dropped more than a year before, but now that Kargbo was out of

detention the criminal process would begin. If he is convicted of a new crime, the deportation process could start again.

Kargbo sat hunched forward, his elbow on one knee, looking at the black screen of his phone. He was waiting to hear back from a community clinic about free samples of his medication. Renee spoke about Kargbo as if he weren't there. "He's a lot quieter now," she told me. "He can't hear you when you talk. I'll be like, 'Son! I've been talking to you for the last five minutes.'"

Kargbo admitted that he wasn't used to stimulation. He said that, in jail, if he wasn't playing spades or reading the Bible, "I just had to just walk around like a crazy man."

"Our relationship is totally different," Renee went on. "It's like, What happened to my Nellie? We just used to be goofballs. We used to talk to each other about everything."

"It's like you said," Kargbo told her, still looking down at his phone. "I changed a little bit, and I'm trying to get back into the groove." ♦



## BACTERIA ON THE BRAIN

*A brilliant surgeon offered an untested treatment to dying patients. Was it innovation or overreach?*

BY EMILY EAKIN

As the chairman of the neurosurgery department at the University of California at Davis, Paul Muizelaar saw patients on Wednesdays, at a clinic housed in a former cannery in East Sacramento. Among the people waiting to see him on the afternoon of November 10, 2010, was Terri Bradley, a fifty-six-year-old woman on whom he had operated the previous May, to remove a malignant brain tumor the size of a lime. Sitting in his office, Muizelaar reviewed Bradley's file. He read a letter from her oncologist, asserting that Bradley was doing well: a brain scan had found no evidence of the tumor. "I think, This sounds great," Muizelaar, a sixty-eight-year-old Dutchman, recalled. "So I go to her exam room with a big smile on my face, and there she is with her daughter, crying, not able to speak."

Muizelaar hadn't seen Bradley's latest test results. Her condition had suddenly deteriorated, and new scans revealed that her tumor—a deadly type known as glioblastoma multiforme, or GBM—had returned. It had spread from the right side of her brain to the left frontal lobe, acquiring an ominous winged shape that doctors refer to as a butterfly glioma. A second tumor had sprouted in the region of her brain associated with speech. Bradley, partially paralyzed and dependent on a wheelchair, had already undergone chemotherapy and radiation; her doctors believed that more drugs were pointless. "The radiologist said, 'I've never seen anything grow so fast,'" Bradley's daughter Janet recalled. "He said, 'Call hospice.' That scared the hell out of me."

Bradley, a fiercely self-reliant woman who had raised four daughters on her own, refused hospice care. Finally, Janet took her to Muizelaar, who said that he was unable to help. "It's a blessing to most patients not to linger," Muizelaar, who practiced medicine in California under a license reserved for eminent foreign-

trained physicians, told me. "Within four weeks, this woman had regrown a massive tumor, plus a second tumor. There was clearly nothing I could do about it."

Yet the conversation did not end there. An hour before Bradley's appointment, Muizelaar had received tantalizing news about a patient on whom he had performed an exceedingly unusual procedure. The previous month, he had operated on Patrick Egan, a fifty-six-year-old real-estate broker, who also suffered from glioblastoma. Egan was a friend of Muizelaar's, and, like Terri Bradley, he had exhausted the standard therapies for the disease. The tumor had spread to his brain stem and was shortly expected to kill him. Muizelaar cut out as much of the tumor as possible. But before he replaced the "bone flap"—the section of skull that is removed to allow access to the brain—he soaked it for an hour in a solution teeming with *Enterobacter aerogenes*, a common fecal bacterium. Then he reattached it to Egan's skull, using tiny metal plates and screws. Muizelaar hoped that inside Egan's brain an infection was brewing.

Muizelaar had devised the procedure in collaboration with a young neurosurgeon in his department, Rudolph Schrot. But as the consent form crafted by the surgeons, and signed by Egan and his wife, made clear, the procedure had never been tried before, even on a laboratory animal. Nor had it been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. The surgeons had no data to suggest what might constitute a therapeutic dose of *Enterobacter*, or a safe delivery method. The procedure was heretical in principle: deliberately exposing a patient to bacteria in the operating room violated a basic tenet of modern surgery, the concept known as "maintaining a sterile field," which, along with prophylactic antibiotics, is credited with sharply reducing complications and mortality rates. "The ensuing infection," the form cautioned, "may be totally ineffective in treatment of the tumor" and could

cause "vegetative state, coma or death."

For four weeks, Egan lay in intensive care, most of the time in a coma. Then, on the afternoon of November 10th, Muizelaar learned that a scan of Egan's brain had failed to pick up the distinctive signature of glioblastoma. The pattern on the scan suggested that the tumor had been replaced by an abscess—an infection—precisely as the surgeons had intended. "A brain abscess can be treated, a glioblastoma cannot," Muizelaar told me. "I was excited, although I knew that clinically the patient was not better."

In Terri Bradley's examination room, Muizelaar impulsively shared what he had just learned. "It escaped my mouth: 'I just got this news about this treatment we tried on this one patient. Even though he is clinically not better, it appears that his tumor is disappearing. I think this might be your only chance.'"

Muizelaar is six feet three and solid, with a ruddy, earnest face and a disarmingly forthright manner. His hands are conspicuously large, his fingers like sausages. It's a myth that neurosurgery requires delicate digits, he said recently, over dinner in Huntington, West Virginia, where he now practices neurosurgery, at Marshall University. "A lot of it is very hard work; to get through the spine, you need lots of strength."

In addition to his medical degree, Muizelaar has a Ph.D. in neurophysiology, and, according to a recent analysis in the journal *Neurosurgery*, three of his papers are among the top hundred most cited in the field. Yet he has devoted far more time to repairing bodies than to testing theories. "This is the crux of my whole thinking: What would you do for your mother, yourself, your daughter, or your granddaughter?" he told me. "I know several neurosurgeons who would say, 'If I ever have a glioblastoma, I would have it infected.'"

The prognosis for glioblastoma is





*Surgical legend holds that infection can lengthen the lives of brain-tumor patients, but the idea has never been proved.*

grim. Even with the standard treatment—surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy—the median survival time from diagnosis is little more than fourteen months. But for decades talk has circulated in the field about glioblastoma patients who, despite hospitals' efforts to keep the O.R. free of germs, acquired a "wound infection" during surgery to remove their tumors. These patients, it was said, often lived far longer than expected. A 1999 article in *Neurosurgery* described four such cases: brain-tumor patients who developed postoperative infections and survived for years, cancer-free.

Three of the patients were infected with *Enterobacter*, the fecal bacterium, and although the cases were anecdotal, and the alleged connection between the bacterium and survival was unproven, the notion became operating-room lore. One neurosurgeon, currently in private practice, told me that his former boss would joke during operations, "If I ever get a GBM, put your finger in your keister and put it in the wound."

Muizelaar had heard a similar, if less graphic, plea from Harold Young, until recently the chair of neurosurgery at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, in Richmond, where, in 1981, he obtained a fellowship, his first job in the United States. "It's true," Young said, when I called him to confirm Muizelaar's account. "There is no other treatment for it." (In 2009, in an attempt to put the wound-infection rumor to rest, neurosurgeons at Columbia University analyzed the records of nearly four hundred GBM patients, and found "no significant survival difference" between the vast majority who did not have an infection and the eighteen who did. However, a 2011 study of nearly two hundred GBM patients by researchers at the Catholic University School of Medicine, in Rome, found that the ten who had wound infections lived, on average, twice as long as those who did not.)

Young's department had firsthand experience with a GBM survivor: a woman with a wound infection who lived for more than a decade. Muizelaar, who eventually took over her care, was fascinated. Cancer is notoriously deft at evading the immune system; he assumed that the bacteria in the woman's brain had triggered an immune response that was eventually directed at her tumor,

but he wasn't especially interested in how that process might work. "I'm very practical," he told me. "I only want to know whether something helps."

As Janet Bradley recalls the meeting on that November afternoon, Muizelaar described the *Enterobacter* procedure at length. "He told me they were going to put bacteria in my mom's brain, and that, in the previous person they did it on, it killed the tumor cells," she said. She asked Muizelaar what he would do if he were in her mother's place. "I would demand that it be done on me!" he replied.

Janet wheeled her mother to the parking lot to discuss the surgeon's proposal. "We were smoking like banshees, because we were so nervous," Janet said. She suggested that they consult the radiologist, a doctor her mother trusted. "So I called him, and explained the procedure to him. He said, 'Your mom's got three months to live. Do it.'"

Researchers who want to test a new therapy on patients typically must submit animal and laboratory data to the F.D.A., showing how the treatment works and that it is safe. But, before the advent of modern science, medical progress often proceeded on the basis of inference rather than evidence. In 1796, Edward Jenner created the first vaccine when, using an unwitting child as a subject, he tested his hunch that exposure to cowpox conferred immunity to smallpox. A century later, the New York surgeon William Coley, also acting on a hunch, injected cancer patients with a *Streptococcus* bacterium and obtained some positive responses. The treatment amounted to a crude form of immunotherapy, but Coley, with virtually no knowledge of microbiology, could only speculate about how it worked—and why, frequently, it didn't.

Coley's general approach is now being vindicated: some of the most promising new cancer drugs enlist the immune system to attack the disease. However, these drugs are engineered with exquisite precision, the products of decades of research. Translating guesswork into science takes time, and time is a luxury that the terminally ill don't have. The lure of the shortcut—of a medicine that would proceed directly from a doctor's intuition to a dying patient's body—has persisted, despite regulations designed to

stamp it out. As the pathologist Sidney Farber, whose experiments on children with leukemia yielded one of the first chemotherapy drugs, pleaded before a Senate committee in 1971, "The three hundred and twenty-five thousand patients with cancer who are going to die this year cannot wait. . . . The history of Medicine is replete with examples of cures obtained years, decades, and even centuries before the mechanism of action was understood for these cures."

Muizelaar's success as a neurosurgeon was based on practical interventions and on close observation of patients' responses, not on a detailed understanding of underlying mechanisms. As a neurosurgery resident in Amsterdam, in the nineteen-seventies, he was captivated by surgeries to repair ruptured brain aneurysms—blood-vessel segments that have swollen and burst, causing life-threatening bleeds. "Treating brain aneurysms was the holy grail of neurosurgery," Muizelaar said. "Only the best did that."

While awaiting surgery, aneurysm patients were sometimes given Amicar, a drug that keeps blood clots from breaking down and was thought to prevent dangerous "rebleeds." Muizelaar and a collaborator decided to test Amicar's benefits for such patients in a clinical trial. Before they began, a colleague showed them a landmark article by the French statisticians Daniel Schwartz and Joseph Lellouch. The authors demonstrated that clinical trials, by imposing tight constraints on variables, were often good at indicating whether a therapy worked the way researchers expected it to, but, because such constraints usually didn't correspond well to real-world conditions, trials were less good at showing whether a therapy actually helped patients.

The Amicar trial was completed in 1981, just as Muizelaar was moving to Richmond to begin his fellowship at V.C.U. Amicar, it turned out, worked very well: there were few rebleeds among the trial patients who got the drug. But the death rate was the same for the patients on Amicar as for those who received a placebo. The difference was that most of the placebo patients died from rebleeds, whereas most of the Amicar patients died from stroke: the drug promoted so much clotting that it interrupted blood flow in the brain. "So the drug worked," Muizelaar said. "It did what it was supposed to do,



prevent rebleeding. But it didn't help."

At V.C.U., Muizelaar made a similar discovery involving the treatment for traumatic brain injury. It was widely assumed that a severely injured brain couldn't regulate blood flow, and that this explained why intracranial pressure in such patients often got dangerously high. Muizelaar found not only that blood-flow response was normal in many of his brain-injured patients but also that, when he increased the amount of blood flowing to their brains, some immediately improved.

He realized that the standard treatment—hyperventilation, in which the patient's respiration rate is increased—worked: it eased intracranial pressure. But, because it substantially reduced blood flow, it often didn't help. Muizelaar went on to conduct a randomized controlled trial, comparing hyperventilated patients with normally ventilated ones. After his study was published, in the *Journal of Neurosurgery*, in 1991, hyperventilation was abandoned as routine care, and the mortality rate for severe brain injury fell from close to forty-five per cent to less than thirty. "That's by far my largest contribution to medicine," Muizelaar said. "It was totally haphazard."

His work on Amicar and blood flow convinced him that the drive to understand mechanism was misguided. Schwartz and Lellouch's article, distilled to its dualistic essence, became a governing mantra. "You must have some justification to try something, but often it turns out to be the wrong supposition," Muizelaar said. "I'm only interested in the result: Does it help? Not whether it works. I don't care."

Compared with research, neurosurgery is a more straightforward enterprise, in which the helpfulness of an intervention is often immediately apparent. (As one neurosurgeon told me, "It only takes a millimetre to change a great outcome into a disaster.") Here, too, Muizelaar distinguished himself early on. "He was a master surgeon," Harold Young, his boss at V.C.U., said. "He would be willing to do the most difficult cases, with outstanding outcomes." By 1991, Muizelaar was a full professor in the department and had bought his first Maserati, secondhand. (Later, in Sacramento, he owned four.) Young recalled with

pleasure high-speed road trips to conferences in Muizelaar's car, with Bach or Thelonious Monk blaring on the stereo.

In 1997, Muizelaar was recruited to U. C. Davis from Wayne State University, in Detroit, where he had spent three years establishing a research program in head and spinal-cord injury. During his tenure in Sacramento, he expanded the residency program and increased the number of surgeries the department performed. Muizelaar performed many of them himself, receiving an extra stipend for operating on Saturdays.

In 2004, Muizelaar hired Rudolph Schrot, a thirty-six-year-old graduate of the residency program, and encouraged him to focus on brain-tumor research. By then, Muizelaar had read the *Neurosurgery* article on the possible link between brain-tumor remission and bacterial infection, and he was caring for his second glioblastoma survivor, a man who lived for twenty-one years with a wound infection that never quite healed. The man's brain had been damaged by radiation—his memory was poor, and he was unable to work—but scans showed no sign of a tumor. In the spring of 2008, when an administrator in Muizelaar's

department asked him to speak with her brother-in-law and his wife about their seven-year-old son, who was dying of glioblastoma, he agreed.

Muizelaar met with the family at his home on a Saturday morning. "The father said to me, 'What would you do if that were your kid?' I said to him, 'I would intentionally infect the tumor site. It probably will not help, but it has a chance.'" The parents decided to pursue a wound-infection procedure involving *Enterobacter*. "Every other type of treatment in Western medicine had been unsuccessful," the boy's mother told me. By the end of the meeting, she said, "we were very well informed as to what the risks were."

Muizelaar asked Schrot to draft a protocol for the procedure and present it to the hospital's Bioethics Consultation Committee. "It was obvious that we needed consent and approval to do this, because a child cannot consent," he said. The committee's proceedings are confidential, but, according to a subsequent investigative report, at a meeting on May 6, 2008, the group concluded that the procedure could be "seen as consistent with the customs and practices



of medicine.” The committee referred the surgeons to Davis’s Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.), which oversees research involving human beings.

A week later, Schrot sent an e-mail to Robert Nelson, a pediatric ethicist and oncologist at the F.D.A., describing the procedure and asking for advice. Nelson replied quickly. “If the product”—*Enterobacter*—“you plan to use is available to you,” he wrote, in part, “I would suggest you proceed under the strategy of innovative treatment rather than research.”

The distinction between innovative treatment and research was addressed for the first time by the Belmont Report, an influential set of ethics guidelines, issued in 1979 and inspired by a case of gross abuse—the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. (In the study, which ran from 1932 to 1972, treatment was withheld from black sharecroppers suffering from syphilis so that researchers could observe the disease’s long-term effects.) The goal of research, the report stated, is the advancement of scientific knowledge, while medical practice is concerned with a patient’s well-being; novel treatments provided in the course of practice do not automatically constitute research.

However, the report’s authors were clearly uneasy with the idea of untested

therapies being offered to patients without regulatory oversight. Innovative treatments should “be made the object of formal research at an early stage in order to determine whether they are safe and effective,” they wrote, and it was the job of I.R.B.s and hospital ethics committees to insure that this happened. As the bioethicist Arthur Caplan, of New York University Langone Medical Center, put it, “You get to muck around a little bit, but not for long.”

In Nelson’s e-mail to Schrot, he recognized that the Davis surgeons sought to provide an innovative treatment for a sick patient and that, moreover, if the *Enterobacter* was on hand in Sacramento the agency would have no authority over its use. But Schrot’s source was a microbe supplier in Virginia; once the *Enterobacter* crossed state lines, it would fall under the F.D.A.’s jurisdiction. In an e-mail on June 11, 2008, an agency official told Schrot that the F.D.A. could not approve the procedure without first seeing data from animal studies, showing how it worked and that it was safe. Schrot and Muizelaar abandoned the plan, and a few months later the boy died.

Schrot channelled his disappointment into the animal research he had long put off. By August, he had arranged for a microbiology lab on campus to order some *Enterobacter* from Virginia on his

behalf, and had hired a graduate student to assist him in a pilot study involving rats. In early 2009, he submitted a grant application to the National Institutes of Health, requesting a hundred thousand dollars for his research. (The N.I.H. rejected the request, writing that, among other flaws, the proposed experiments were “mundane, descriptive and not mechanistic.” The project was also judged to be of questionable value, “since it is very unlikely any IRB or the FDA will allow the introduction of *Enterobacter aerogenes* directly into patients.”)

Despite these efforts, the surgeons had no animal data to share when Muizelaar proposed the *Enterobacter* procedure to his friend Patrick Egan, in October, 2010. “We were still struggling to get brain tumors in rats,” Muizelaar recalled. Egan’s family was undeterred. “I understand the theory behind what Paul did with Pat,” Egan’s widow, Rebecca Rich, who lost a previous husband to leukemia, told me. “I also understand the way the end of life occurs with no treatment. To all of us, it just seemed like the right thing to do.”

Muizelaar e-mailed a draft of Egan’s consent form to the hospital’s chief medical officer, and on October 11th, four days before the procedure, Schrot discussed it in a telephone call with Eric Mah, then the director of Davis’s I.R.B. Schrot explained that he wanted to treat a dying patient with live bacteria from his lab. (Although Schrot did not assist with any of the *Enterobacter* surgeries, he did much of the advance legwork and helped care for patients.) In a follow-up e-mail, Mah wrote, “I do not believe this requires IRB review as it does not qualify as human subjects research.” Nor, he went on, does the procedure fall under the F.D.A.’s authority, “because you are treating a single patient in the course of clinical care” and “are not trying to obtain the drug/biologic from an outside source.”

A month later, Schrot called Mah again, to discuss performing the procedure on Terri Bradley. This time, Mah’s follow-up e-mail registered surprise and unease. He also cc’d Muizelaar. “When we initially spoke, I understood the innovative/unconventional treatment was an extremely rare event with a terminally ill patient who was rapidly declining,” he began. “As you increase that number



“Don’t tell Coach about this—he doesn’t want us to be friends.”



of patients, however, your activity could appear to be human research.”

Mah reiterated his understanding that the *Enterobacter* was “locally grown,” and urged Schrot to consult the chief medical officer. He concluded with an admonition, in boldface: “If you anticipate another future patient will need this unconventional/innovative treatment, I recommend a treatment IND application”—for experimental drugs—“be submitted to FDA and the protocol undergo IRB review, as appropriate, prior to the next procedure.” Muizelaar wasn’t concerned by Mah’s e-mail, or by his caveat about future patients. After Terri Bradley, he said, “I didn’t intend to do any more patients.” On November 19, 2010, Bradley became the second patient to undergo the *Enterobacter* procedure.

Four days later, Patrick Egan died. He only fleetingly regained consciousness, and his family decided not to keep him alive through artificial means. An autopsy found evidence of cancer and infection. (“Very little tumor, practically all abscess,” Muizelaar said.) At the same time, Terri Bradley began to improve. During her surgery, Muizelaar had removed as much as he could of the tumor in her right frontal lobe, but he did not touch the part that had spread to the left side of her brain or the tumor in her speech area. Within a few weeks, she was able to talk again, and a brain scan showed that the tumor in her speech area was shrinking. During the next several months, it disappeared, and the butterfly glioma shrank to the size of a dime. “I thought, Wow, these guys are good,” Janet Bradley recalled. “They’re going to figure it out.” The surgeons were also excited. “This woman should have been dead,” Muizelaar said. “Her speech got better, and one of her two tumors disappeared. It was incredible.”

In late February, 2011, he examined a sixty-one-year-old woman who arrived in the emergency room suffering from headaches and seizures. A scan revealed a giant glioblastoma in the right hemisphere of her brain. Muizelaar told her about the standard treatment—surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Then he described the *Enterobacter* therapy. The woman’s tumor was “so massive and deep in her brain, we knew we couldn’t completely resect it,” he told

me. But Terri Bradley’s response had emboldened him. Never before had he offered the therapy to a newly diagnosed patient, who had yet to pursue the standard treatment for the disease.

Muizelaar told me that, at the time, he did not recall Mah’s e-mail urging Schrot to seek F.D.A. and I.R.B. approval before providing the therapy to other patients. “I never thought about complications for me or for the univer-



sity,” he said. “I was just treating patients to the best of my abilities.”

The third patient, whose name has not been made public, underwent the *Enterobacter* procedure on March 3rd. For a week afterward, she was comatose. Then, little by little, she became more alert and began to follow simple commands. While she was improving, an oncologist in Sacramento who had heard about the procedure referred a glioblastoma patient to Muizelaar for a consultation. At that point, Muizelaar says, he realized that additional procedures could be construed as research. He asked Schrot to draft a proposal for treating several more patients in advance of a “formal, I. R. B.-approved clinical trial,” and he asked Karen Smith, a nurse who ran a support group for brain-tumor patients, to assemble an ad-hoc committee of physicians to review the ethics of the plan. The committee would then make a formal recommendation to the I.R.B.

The ad-hoc committee never convened. Instead, on the afternoon of March 16th Muizelaar, Schrot, and Smith met with Eric Mah and two I.R.B. committee chairs in a conference room at the hospital. The mood in the room was tense. Mah later told an investigator that he hadn’t known about the third *Enterobacter* patient until he read Schrot’s proposal. He was shocked by its implication that he had approved more than one procedure.

Muizelaar arrived fifteen minutes late, directly from the I.C.U. According

to Smith, as he walked into the room he announced, “I’ve got egg on my face. Our third patient is not doing well—she is going to die.” After a brief discussion, the meeting was adjourned. “It was understood by everyone there that this was stopping,” Smith said. The next day, Mah sent Schrot an e-mail, copying Muizelaar, with the subject line “Cease and Desist.” Allan Siefkin, the chief medical officer, also sent a sternly worded rebuke that concluded, “DO NOT PERFORM ANY ADDITIONAL SURGERY ON ANY PATIENTS USING THIS PROCEDURE!” That morning, the third *Enterobacter* patient died, of a stroke, after intravenous antibiotics failed to reverse her decline. “The infection overwhelmed her brain,” Muizelaar said.

Muizelaar and Schrot’s conduct in the wound-infection procedures might have remained an internal disciplinary matter at U. C. Davis had documents about the case not been leaked to the *Sacramento Bee*. By the time the paper published its first article about the procedures, in the summer of 2012, the surgeons’ activities had already been subject to three reviews: by the I.R.B., by a committee of senior physicians at the university, and by a committee on biosafety. This last determined that the *Enterobacter* in Schrot’s lab had not been procured for use in humans and ordered the surgeons to destroy the stocks and to euthanize the rats. The I.R.B. faulted the surgeons for misrepresenting the *Enterobacter* from Virginia as locally grown. (In their response to the I.R.B.’s report, Muizelaar and Schrot said that the error was inadvertent. “If I had known this was going to be an issue, I would have cultured the bacteria out of the patients’ own stools,” Muizelaar told me.)

The investigators were most troubled by the second and third procedures. The I.R.B. charged that these constituted unauthorized research, and suggested a pattern of “continuing noncompliance” with university and, possibly, federal policies. The senior physicians—some of whom knew Muizelaar and Schrot well—were more sympathetic. They objected that senior administrators had not been properly consulted, and that, in the case of the third patient, an untested therapy had been given at the time of diagnosis, in violation of accepted

practice. Yet the committee, which issued letters of warning to Muizelaar and Schrot, recognized that both surgeons had acted with good intentions. Siefkin, the chief medical officer, later told an investigator that Muizelaar was “transparent to a fault.” When investigators for a federal agency criticized the hospital’s handling of the procedures, administrators defended Muizelaar and Schrot, while admitting that they had made mistakes. They wrote, “We acknowledge that two neurosurgeons provided non-standard, innovative, compassionate care to three patients with a grim prognosis of glioblastoma multiforme. The treatment was not experimental.”

For a while, it seemed that Muizelaar and Schrot would emerge from the affair largely unscathed. In September, 2011, the I.R.B. barred them from research activity. Schrot volunteered to attend a three-day course, sponsored by the F.D.A., on the proper conduct for clinical trials. Muizelaar did not enroll. “Partly, I was too busy,” he said. “But I had the audacity to think that I knew more about clinical trials than anyone at the I.R.B.” The following March, the hospital adopted a new policy, under the heading “Innovative Care,” which included strict approval and oversight requirements. That April, Muizelaar was named the first holder of the Julian R. Youmans Chair, endowed by Youmans himself, the founding chairman of the neurosurgery department at Davis and the editor of a textbook that remains a standard in the field. According to a press release announcing the appointment, Muizelaar planned to use endowment funds “to search for leading-edge neurosurgical treatments for brain tumors.”

By then, Terri Bradley was dead. Despite the remarkable brain scans early on, her physical recovery faltered. She remained lethargic and partially paralyzed, and had trouble forming words. The oozing wound in her skull emitted an unbearable stench. “Walking into that room, I felt so bad for her roommate,” Janet said. “I’ve never smelled anything worse in my life.”

In October, 2011, Muizelaar and Schrot finally decided to treat Terri’s *Enterobacter* infection, by removing her bone flap and flushing the wound with antibiotics. A month later, she died. She

had lived for a year and a week after the wound-infection procedure, but to her daughters the achievement felt hollow. “It was miserable for her,” Janet said. “She had no quality of life.” Whether the treatment worked, Muizelaar had no way of knowing. But it did not help.

In July, 2012, a friend of Janet’s called to tell her that her mother’s surgeons were on the front page of the *Bee*. The story, one of more than a dozen that the paper devoted to the *Enterobacter* procedures, was a shocking scoop. “A prominent UC Davis neurosurgeon was banned from performing medical research on humans after he and an underling were accused of experimenting on dying brain cancer patients without university permission,” it began. (One reader, in a letter to the editor protesting the coverage, likened the portrayal of Muizelaar to “a Dr. Frankenstein clone.”) Linda Katehi, the chancellor of the university, instructed the provost to open a new investigation and, a few days later, ordered Muizelaar to step down as chair. Additional investigations followed: by the main hospital accreditation organization, and by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which excoriated hospital staff for failing to question the surgeons’ conduct. Among other violations, the agency cited the unauthorized presence in the O.R. of Schrot’s research assistant, who transported *Enterobacter* from the lab inside a Styrofoam cooler.

“When I found out what really happened, I was ticked off,” Janet said. From an article in the *Bee*, she learned that the bacteria implanted in her mother’s brain normally resided in the bowel. “If they would have told me that, no way would I have O.K.’d that,” she said. She went on, “Had they done it the legal way, they might have been onto something. They should have waited, been patient, done their research.”

In a two-part interview, Terri Bradley’s daughters told the *Bee* that the *Enterobacter* surgery had “prolonged her suffering” and that they were contemplating a lawsuit. But Terri’s yearlong survival posed an obstacle, and the Bradleys were unable to find a lawyer in California who was willing to represent them. As Alan Milstein, the New Jersey attorney who ultimately took the

case, explained, “There wasn’t any evidence that enrolling her in the experiment hastened her demise.”

U. C. Davis eventually settled two *Enterobacter* suits out of court: the Bradleys’, for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and one brought by the family of the third patient, for six hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. Patrick Egan’s family never considered suing. In a letter to the *Bee*, Rebecca Rich, Egan’s widow, thanked Muizelaar and Schrot for their care of her husband, writing that “there were no choices left except hospice and a slow, deplorable end of life.”

By early August, 2013, the Davis investigations were complete. A report written by Lisa Ikemoto, a Davis law professor specializing in bioethics, was harshly critical. Ikemoto concluded that Muizelaar and Schrot had violated the Faculty Code of Conduct by performing unauthorized research on human subjects, and that they had knowingly done so. “The evidence overwhelmingly establishes that Dr. Muizelaar knew that he did not have the necessary approvals from the IRB or the CMO”—the chief medical officer—“to proceed with the procedure on Patient 3, but that he nonetheless did so,” she wrote. According to Ikemoto’s report, when an investigator asked Schrot why he had not waited for animal data before implanting *Enterobacter* in humans, he told her that the lab work would take “ten years . . . his entire career.” The investigator described Schrot’s conduct as “reckless.” Muizelaar retired, and Schrot resigned.

Muizelaar’s home, near Huntington, is a stately brick Tudor overlooking a rushing creek. When I visited Muizelaar, last spring, there was a “For Sale” sign on the lawn—“It’s way too big for me,” he said. He moved into the house last year, after the chair of neurosurgery at Marshall, Anthony Alberico, a former resident of his, offered him a job. “I knew his character and his skill set,” Alberico said. (Schrot was hired by a private practice in Sacramento.) Inside, the house had an unlivable air. In the living room, stiff-backed chairs appeared undisturbed by human contact. Apart from a couple of family photographs, a bottle of Cabernet signed by Robert Mondavi,

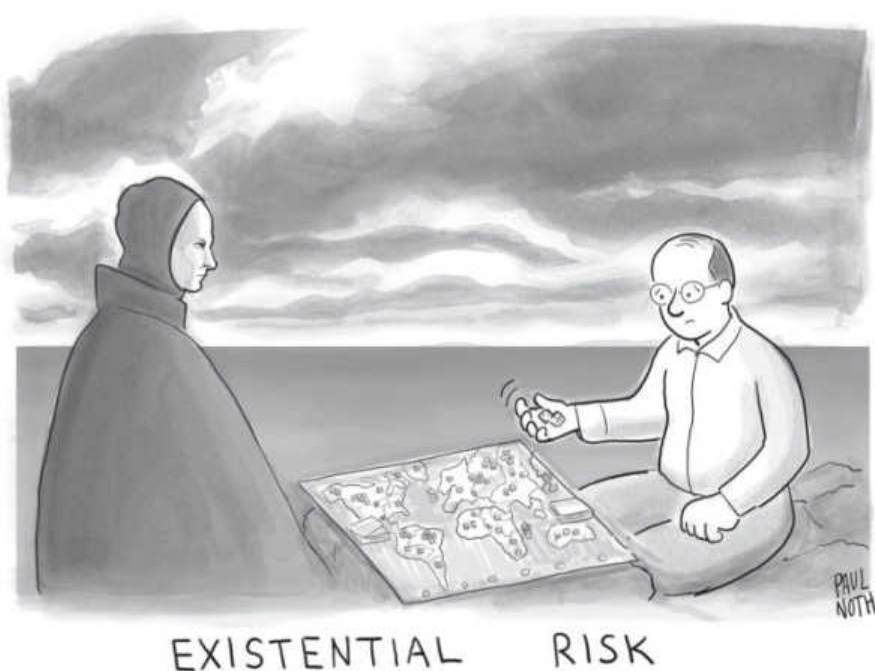


and a teaching award from Davis, there were no personal effects. Muizelaar, who had come from morning rounds at the hospital, was still in his scrubs. He put on the Grateful Dead and made me a “Dutch lunch”: a slab of dark rye with peanut butter and Indonesian hot sauce, accompanied by a hunk of aged Gouda.

As we ate in the dining room, he recalled that one of the *Bee* articles about him had invoked the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. “That was research, and it was racist research,” he said, his eyes watering, his voice husky. “We tried to treat patients.”

On more than one occasion, he cited a 1994 article by John Lantos, a pediatrician and bioethicist at the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine, titled “How Can We Distinguish Clinical Research from Innovative Therapy?” “What John Lantos says is that most people cannot make the distinction,” Muizelaar told me. But Lantos was saying something else, too. Ethical guidelines have focussed much more on research than on innovative care, because we assume that people need greater protection from an investigator, whose primary interest is knowledge, than from a clinician, whose primary interest is a patient’s well-being. This focus is lopsided, Lantos argues, encouraging a physician to try—without much oversight or risk of penalty—a new therapy based merely on his “own imperfect hunches.” Such is the effect of ethical codes that “regulate the responsible investigator but not the irresponsible adventurer.”

In the years since Lantos’s article, we’ve become less tolerant of risk. According to a recent study, the number of regulatory requirements imposed by the F.D.A. increased by at least fifteen per cent between 2000 and 2012—a reflection, in part, of a desire to root out imperfect hunches. Consider the experimental treatment for glioblastoma that was featured on two widely viewed broadcasts of “60 Minutes,” in March. For ten months, the program followed patients at Duke in a Phase I trial of an immunotherapy made from the virus that causes polio, genetically altered so that it could infect only tumor cells, not healthy tissue. All the patients had dismal prognoses. The first to receive the drug was a twenty-year-old nursing student, in 2012. Her



## EXISTENTIAL RISK

tumor shrank for months, and then disappeared. The second patient, a seventy-year-old retired cardiologist, also had a complete remission. At the time of the broadcasts, eleven of the trial’s twenty-two patients were improving or in remission. (The others had died.) “I’ve never seen results like this,” Darell Bigner, the director of Duke’s brain-tumor center, told “60 Minutes.”

Matthias Gromeier, the Duke researcher who developed the therapy, told me that the trial’s success was a tribute to painstaking science—and to the value of strict regulation. “There’s this illusion out there that you can move things from the lab to the patient in a few years,” he said. “It’s all nonsense.”

Gromeier created the altered poliovirus twenty-one years ago, when he was a postdoctoral fellow. Studies he did at the time suggested that poliovirus has a strong affinity for brain cancer: receptors that the virus targets are prevalent on the surface of tumors. The paper he wrote proposing the altered virus as a potential treatment for glioblastoma was rejected by two top journals before being published, in 2000. It took more than a decade of lab work—in mice, then in monkeys—before the F.D.A. allowed Duke to test the virus in humans.

“It took forever, and it almost killed

me, but it was the right thing to do,” Gromeier said. “We were forced to investigate mechanistically what we were doing. In hindsight, this was the most important factor in where we are now.” (The virus appears to work, in part, by disarming tumor defenses, enabling the immune system to attack.)

Muizelaar watched the “60 Minutes” episodes with admiration. “Those two patients—the cardiologist and the nurse—it’s unbelievable!” Of the Duke researchers, he said, “They are incredibly good. This has happened before, haphazardly, but no one’s done anything like this on purpose.” At one point, he began to speculate about how the altered poliovirus worked, before catching himself. “But I am very skeptical about mechanisms,” he said. Although Muizelaar is no longer performing wound-infection procedures, he hasn’t given up on the idea. He was heartened to read, in a recent issue of *Neurosurgery*, an article proposing *Clostridium novyi*, a common soil bacterium, as a potential therapy for brain tumors. This spring, a wealthy supporter gave him seventy-five thousand dollars to begin a new study of *Enterobacter* in rats with glioblastoma. “If, God forbid, I ever get such a tumor myself,” he said, “I hope by then somebody will have shown that this works—or helps.” ♦



# OKTOBER

BY MARTIN AMIS



I sat drinking black tea in the foyer of the hotel. (This was in Munich.) A lady wearing a lustrous purple trouser suit was seated at the keys of the baby grand in the far corner, her rendition of “Hungarian Rhapsody” (with many adornments and curlicues) for now unable to drown out the inarticulate howling and baying from the bar beyond the lifts. It was the time of Oktoberfest, and the city was playing host to six million visitors, thereby quintupling its population—visitors from all over Bavaria, and from all over Germany, and from all over the world. Other visitors, a far smaller contingent, were also expected, visitors who hoped to stay, and to stay indefinitely; they were coming from what was once known as the Fertile Crescent.

“Let’s see if we can make a bit of sense of this,” an itinerant businessman was bleakly saying, bent over his mobile phone two tables away, with clipboard, legal pad, gaping laptop. He spoke in the only language I could understand—English—and his accent derived from northern regions, northern cities (Hull, Leeds, Grimsby). “I should’ve rung two weeks ago. Three. All right, a month ago. But that doesn’t affect the matter at hand, now does it? Believe me, the only thing that’s kept me back’s the prospect of having to... Listen. Are you listening to me? We need to resolve the indemnity clause. Clause 4C.” He sighed. “Have you got the paperwork in front of you at least? Quite honestly, it beats me how you get anything done. I’m a busy man and I’m accustomed to dealing with people who have some idea of what they’re up to. Will you listen? Will you listen?”

The photographer arrived, and after a minute he and I went out into the street. In great numbers, the Oktoberfesters were streaming past, the women in cinched dirndls and wenchy blouses, the men in suède or leather breeches laced just below the knee, tight jackets studded with medals or badges, and jaunty little hats with feathers, rosettes, cockades. On the pavement, Bernhardt erected his tripod and his tilted umbrella, and I prepared myself to enter the usual trance of inanition—forgetting that in this part of Eurasia, at least for now, there was no longer any small talk. But first I said, “What do

they actually do in that park of theirs?”

“In the funfair?” Bernhardt smiled with a touch of skeptical fondness. “A lot of drinking. A lot of eating. And singing. And dancing—if you can call it that. On tabletops.”

“Sort of clumping about?”

“The word is *schunkeln*. They link arms and sway while they sing. From side to side. Thousands of them.”

“*Schunkeln*’s the infinitive, right? How d’you spell that?”

“I’ll write it down for you. Yes, the infinitive.”

Our session began. Broad-shouldered and stubbly but also delicately handsome, Bernhardt was an Iranian-German (his family had come over in the nineteen-fifties); he was also very quick and courteous, and, of course, seamlessly fluent.

“Last week I came by train from Salzburg,” he said as he began wrapping up. “There were eight hundred refugees on board.”

“Eight hundred. And how were they?”

“Very tired. And hungry. And dirty. Some with children, some with old people. They all want to get to this country because they have friends and family here. Germany is trying to be welcoming, trying to be kind, but... I took many photographs. If you like I’ll drop some off for you.”

“Please. I’d be grateful.”

And I remembered that other photograph from the front pages a few days ago. Fifteen or twenty refugees disembarking at a German rail station and being met with applause from sympathetic citizens; in the photograph, some of the arrivals were smiling, some laughing, and some were just breathing deeply and walking that much taller, it seemed, as if something had at last been restored to them.

I shook Bernhardt’s hand and said, “Trying to be kind. When I was in Berlin, the police closed a crossroads in the Tiergarten. Then bikes and a motorcade came through. The Austrian head of state. Faymann. For a little summit with Merkel. Hours later, they announced they were sealing the border.”

“The numbers. The scale.”

“And the day before yesterday I was in Salzburg and there were no trains to Munich. All cancelled. We came here by car.”

“Long wait at the border?”

“Only if you go on the highway. That’s what the driver told us. He took the parallel roads.” I hesitated. “On your train to Munich...”

I felt the impulse to ask Bernhardt if at any point he had found it necessary to disengage himself from the eight hundred. I didn’t ask, but I could have and should have.

Bernhardt said, “You know, they won’t stop coming. They pay large sums of money to risk their lives crossing the sea and then they walk across Europe. They *walk* across Europe. A few policemen and a stretch of barbed wire can’t keep them out. And there are millions more where they came from. This is going to go on for years. And they won’t stop coming.”

It was one-fifty. I had forty minutes. (My book tour was winding down and this was not a busy day.) In the bar, I waited at the steel counter. When Bernhardt asked me how I was bearing up after three weeks on the road in Europe, I said I was well enough, though chronically underslept. Which was true. And actually, Bernhardt, to be even more frank with you, I feel unaccountably anxious, anxious almost to the point of formication (which the dictionary defines as “a sensation like insects crawling over the skin”); it comes and goes. ... Home was four thousand miles away, and six hours behind; pretty soon, it would be quite reasonable, surely, to return yet again to my room and see if there were any fresh bulletins from that quarter. For now, I looked mistrustfully at my phone; in the in-box there were more than eighteen hundred unopened messages, but from wife, from children, as far as I could tell, there was nothing new.

The heroically methodical bartender duly set his course in my direction. I asked for a beer.

“Nonalcoholic. D’you have that?”

“I have one-per-cent alcoholic.”

We were both needing to shout.

“One per cent.”

“Alcohol is everywhere. Even an apple is one-per-cent alcoholic.”

I shrugged. “Go on, then.”

The beer the Oktobrists were drinking by the quart was thirteen per cent, or double strength; this, at any rate, was the claim of the young Thomas Wolfe,

who, after a couple of steins of it, acquired a broken nose, four scalp wounds, and a cerebral hemorrhage in a frenzied brawl, which he started, in some fun-fair mud pit—but that was in 1928. These male celebrants in fancy dress at the bar had been drinking since 9 A.M. (I saw and heard them at breakfast), before setting off for the Theresienwiese, if indeed they ever went there. I saw them and heard them the night before, too; at that point they were either gesticulating and yelling in inhumanly loud voices or else staring at the floor in rigid penitence, their eyes clogged and woe-ful. Then, as now, the barman attended to them all with unconcern, going about his tasks with practiced neutrality.

I was carrying a book: the forthcoming “Letters to Véra,” by Véra’s husband, Vladimir Nabokov. But the voices around me were unrelaxingly shrill—I could concentrate on what I was reading, just about, but I could extract no pleasure from it. So I took my drink back into the foyer, where the pianist, after a break, had resumed. The businessman was still on the phone; as before, we were sitting two tables apart, and back to back. Occasionally I heard snatches (“Have you got any office *method* where you are?

Have you?”). But now I was slowly and appreciatively turning the pages, listening to that other voice, V.N.’s: humorous, resilient, full of energy. The letters begin in 1923; two years earlier, he sent his mother a short poem, as proof “that my mood is as radiant as ever. If I live to be a hundred, my spirit will still go around in short trousers.”

When January dawned in 1924, Vladimir (a year older than the century) was in Prague, helping his mother and his two younger sisters settle into their cheap and freezing new apartment. (“Jesus, it’s called basic *gumption*. Do you know how you spell that?”) These former boyars were now displaced and deracinated—and had “no money at all.” (“5C? No. Obviously. 4C. 4C, for Christ’s sake.”) Vladimir himself, like his future wife, the *Judin Véra* Slonim, had settled in Berlin, along with almost half a million other Russian fugitives from 1917. And in Berlin the two of them would blithely and stubbornly remain. Their lone child, Dmitri, was born there in 1934. The Nuremberg Laws were passed in September, 1935, and they began to be enforced and expanded after the Berlin Olympics of 1936; but not until 1937 did the Nabokovs hurriedly decamp to

France, after a (seemingly never-ending) struggle with visas and exit permits and Nansen passports.

“I bet you don’t. O.K., here’s an idea. Why don’t you pop on a plane and come and tell them that, here in Germany? With your approach, so-called? They’d laugh you out of town. Because here they happen to understand a thing or two about efficiency. Unlike some. And that’s why they’re the powerhouse of Europe. Because they can handle the ABC and the two times two.”

I put the book aside and briefly reminisced about Angela (with a hard “g”)—Angela Merkel. I was introduced to her (a handshake and an exchange of hellos) by Tony Blair, in 2007, when she was two years into her first term (and I was spending several weeks on and off in the Prime Minister’s entourage). The top floor of the titanic new Chancellery, the full bar arrayed on the table, the (as yet spotless) ashtrays, Angela’s humorous and particularizing smile. The Chancellery was twelve times the size of the White House—where Blair would also squire me, a week or two later, but I had no more than a sudden moment of eye contact with President Bush, as the two of them emerged from the Situation Room. (This was the time of the Surge in Iraq.)

Merkel, raised in East Germany in the early days of the Cold War . . . So far, there have been several dozen female heads of state, and I thought then that she was perhaps the first who was capable of ruling *as a woman*. In the summer months of 2015, in the world’s eyes she became the brutal auditress of the Greek Republic (and the compromiser of its sovereignty, in the name of fiscal rectitude); by late September, they were calling her *Mutti* Merkel, as she opened her gates as wide as she could to the multitudes of the dispossessed.

This is to some extent true of every human community on earth, but the national poet here said of his Germans, with a strain of agony, how impressive they were singly (how balanced, how reflective, how sardonic), and how desperately disappointing they were plurally, in groups, in cadres, in leagues, in blocs. And yet here they all were (for now), the Germans, setting a progressive, even a futuristic example to Europe



*“Would you like to try some of our over-the-counter drugs while you wait for your prescription?”*



and to the planet (for now), both as a polity and as a people.

With the refugee crisis of 2015, Europe, Chancellor Merkel (commonly referred to as “the Decider”) said, was about to face its “historic test.”

“Will you listen to me? Will you listen to me?”

But, like a washing machine, the businessman had moved on to a quieter cycle. Still tensed, still crouched, but reduced to a sour mutter. The pianist’s shift was apparently at an end, and I was grimacing into a phone myself, fielding supplementary questions from a studious young profelist I had talked to in Frankfurt. Eavesdroppers and those active in identity theft might have been tempted to draw near, but the foyer continued to be more or less empty.

“Nineteen-forty-nine,” I said, “in Oxford. Not Wales—that was later. Yes, go ahead. Why did we move to America? Because . . . it sounds complicated, but it’s an ordinary story. In 2010, my mother, Hilary, died. She was eighty-two. My mother-in-law, the mother of my wife, Elena, was also eighty-two at the time. So in response to that we moved to New York.” Yes, and Elena ended a voluntary exile in London which had lasted twenty-seven years, returning to where she was born and bred (Greenwich Village). “Us now? No. Brooklyn. Since 2011. You get too old for Manhattan.” We made our way to the final question. “This trip? Six countries.” And ten cities. “Oh, definitely. And I’m reading all I can find on it, and everyone’s talking about nothing else. Well, I only met literary types, no politicians, no experts. But of course I have impressions.”

Our call wound up. The businessman was going on in his minatory whisper, “You know who you remind me of? The hordes of ragamuffins who’re piling into this country even as I speak. You, you just can’t stand on your own two feet, can you? You’re helpless.”

An angular youth from the reception desk approached and handed me a foolscap manila envelope. In it were Bernhardt’s photographs. Registering this, I felt the rhythm of my unease slightly accelerate. I moved next door into the restaurant, and I fanned them out on the table.

The Europeans you talked to offered

different views and prescriptions, but the underfeeling seemed to center on an encounter with something, something not quite unknown but known only at a distance. The entity accumulating at the borders, the entity for which they were bracing and were even rousing themselves to greet with good will and good grace, seemed amorphous, undifferentiated, almost insensate—like a force of nature.

And it was as if Bernhardt’s camera had set itself the task of individualization, because here was a black-and-white *galère* of immediately and endearingly recognizable shapes and faces, bantering, yawning, frowning, grinning, scowling, weeping, in postures of exhaustion, stoic dynamism, and, of course, extreme uncertainty and dismay. . . .

When you glimpsed them in the train stations, they were configured in narrow strings or little knots, always moving, their gaze and gait strictly forward-directed (with no waste of attention, with no attention to spare). But in Salzburg two days earlier I saw seventy or eighty of them lined up on a street corner, very predominantly very young men, in international teen-age gear: baseball caps, luminous windcheaters, dark glasses. Soon they would be approaching the German border (just a few miles away)—and then what? Theirs was a journey with charts and graphs and updates (those cell phones) but with no destination. Dawn had just arrived in Austria, and the buildings shone sheepishly in the wet. And you thought, How will all this look and feel a few weeks from now—after Oktober?

At four o’clock, as scheduled, I was joined by my penultimate interviewer, an academic, who began by reminding me of a salient historical fact. She was middle-aged, so it was not in her living memory, but it was in the living memory of her mother. In the period from 1945 to ’47, there were ten million homeless supplicants on the periphery of what was once the Reich, all of them deported (in spasms of greater or lesser violence, with at least half a million deaths en route) from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania. And they were all Germans.

“So your mother remembers that?”

“Well, she was at the station. She was seven or eight. She remembers the iced-up cattle cars. It was Christmas.”

I had been gone for seventy-five minutes, and the businessman was still in mid-conversation. By now, his phone had a charger in it, and the short lead, plugged into a ground-level socket, required him to bend even tighter—he was jackknifed forward, with his chin an inch from the knee-high tabletop.

“You carry on like this and you won’t have a roof over your head. You’ll be on the street and you’ll deserve it. The wheels are coming off your whole apple cart.

And I’m not surprised. Bloody hell, people like you. You make me sick, you do. Professionally sick.”

The pianist had gone but other noise-makers were taking up the reins—a factory-size vacuum cleaner, a lorry revving and panting in the forecourt. I went back to my book. August, 1924, and Vladimir was in Czechoslovakia again, holidaying with his mother in Dobřichovice. The hotel was expensive, and they were sharing a (sizable) room divided in two by a white wardrobe. Soon he would return to Berlin, where Véra . . .

All ambient sounds suddenly ceased, and the businessman was saying, “D’you know who this is? Do you? It’s Geoffrey. Geoffrey Vane. Geoffrey. Geoff. Yeah. You know me. And you know what I’m like. . . . Right, my patience is at an end. Congratulations. Or, as you’d say, *super*. . . . Now. Get your fucking Mac and turn to your fucking e-mails. Do you understand me? Do you understand me? Go to the communication from the fucking agent. The on-site agent. You know, that fucking Argy—Feron. Fucking Roddy Feron. Got it? Now bring up the fucking attachment. Got it? Right—fucking 4C.”

The often used intensifier he pronounced like “cooking” or “booking.” At this point, I slowly slid into the chair opposite me, so I could have a proper look at him—the clerical halo of quite thick gray hair, the head, still direly bowed and intent, the laptop, the legal pad.

“It’s the fucking liability. Do you



understand me? Now *say*. 4C. Does that, or does that not, square with Tulkingshorn's B6? It does? Well, let's thank the Lord for small mercies. Now go back to fucking 4C. And fucking O.K. it. O.K.? O.K." He added, with special menace, "And woe betide you if we have to go through this again. You fucking got that? Sweet dreams. Yeah, *cheers*."

And now, in unwelcome symmetry, the businessman also moved to the seat opposite him, though swiftly and without rising above a crouch; with his meaty right hand he appeared to be mopping himself down, seeing to the pink brow dotted with motes of sweat, the pale and moist upper lip. Our eyes met inexorably, and he focussed.

"Do you understand English?"

... Do I understand English? "Uh, yeah," I said.

"Ah."

And I speak it, too. Great Britain no longer had an empire, except the empire of words—not the imperial state, just the imperial tongue. Everyone knew English. The refugees knew English, a little bit. That partly explained why they wanted to get to the U.K. and Eire, because everyone there knew English. And it was why they wanted to get to Germany: the refugees knew no German, but the Germans all knew English—the nut-brown maid who was brushing the curtains knew English, the sandy-haired bellhop knew English.

"You're *English*," he announced, with reluctant admiration.

I found myself saying, "London, born and bred." Not quite true, but this wasn't the time to expatiate on my babyhood—with the mother who was barely older than I was—in the Home Counties, circa 1950, or to dream out loud about that early decade in South Wales, mostly blissful, when the family was still nuclear. But, for half a century after that, yes, it was London. He said, "I can tell by the way you talk. ... That was a tough one, that."

"The phone call."

"The phone call. You know, with some people, they haven't got a clue, quite honestly. You've just got to start from scratch. Every—every time."

"I bet." And I cursorily imagined a youngish middle manager, slumped over his disorderly workstation in a depot or showroom by an airport somewhere,

loosening his tie as he pressed the hot phone to his reddened ear.

"Look at that," the businessman said, meaning the television—the eternally silent television. On its flat screen, half a dozen uniformed guards were tossing shop sandwiches (cellophane-wrapped) into a caged enclosure, and those within seemed to snap at them—and it was impossible to evade the mental image of feeding time at the zoo. "Amazing," he said with contented absorption, as he made some calculations on his yellow pad. "Amazing the lengths people'll go to for a handout, in't it?"

The "in't it?" was rhetorical: this truism anticipated no reply. In Kraków and Warsaw (I recalled, as the businessman immersed himself in his columned figures), everyone was saying that Poland would be exempt: the only homogeneous country in Central Europe, the only monoculture, blue-eyed Poland thought it would be exempt because "the state gives no benefits." I heard this from a translator so urbane that he could quote at length not only from Tennyson but also from Robert Browning; and in answer I nodded, and resumed work on my heavy meal. But when I was dropped off at the hotel (and stood on the square facing the antique prosthetic leg of Stalin's Palace of Culture), I slowly shook my head. Someone who has trekked across the Hindu Kush would not be coming to Poland for a diet of shop sandwiches.

"Where are we? What country's this?"

He meant the country where dark-skinned travellers were being tumbled and scattered by water cannon (followed up with tear gas and pepper spray).

I said, "Looks like Hungary."

"That bloke there's got the right idea."

He paused as he closed his eyes and his bloodless lips mimed a stretch of mental arithmetic. "What's he called?"

"Orbán."

"Yeah. Orbán. We ought to be doing likewise in Calais. It's the only language they understand."

Oh, no, sir, the language they understand is much harsher than that. The language they understand consists of barrel bombs and nerve gas and the scimitars of incandescent theists. That language is what they are fleeing; it speaks to them only of fear and futurelessness. He said, "Merkel. Merkel should

take a leaf out of Orbán's book. Merkel should do an Orbán. Look. See?"

He meant the footage evidently posted by the Islamic State—a truck exploding in slow motion, three prisoners in orange jumpsuits kneeling on a dune, multipronged fighters tearing by in S.U.V.s.

"Then there's *that*." He achieved some climactic grand total on his pad, underlined it three times and circled it before tossing the pen aside. "Jihadis."

"Might be complicated," I said.

"Complicated. ... Hang about," he said, with a doubtful frown. "Silly me. Forgot to factor in the twelve per cent. Give us a minute."

Perhaps a better name for them, sir, would be *takfiris*. The *takfir* accusation (the lethal accusation of unbelief) is almost as old as Islam, but, in current usage, *takfiris*, Mr. Vane, is sharply derogatory, and it means Muslims who presume to kill Muslims. And these *takfiris* don't and won't mind, Geoffrey, when the Muslims of Europe suffer, because their policy here is the same as Lenin's during the Russian Civil War: "the worse the better." Is it fanciful, Geoff, to suggest that this lesson derives from the witches in the Scottish play—"Fair is foul, and foul is fair"?

"*Complicated*? That's the understatement of the year."

Suddenly he became aware of the phone he had reflexively reached for. He inhaled with resignation and said, "You know what gets me? The repetitions. You go through the same things again and again. And it just doesn't sink in. Not with that one, oh, no. Not with her."

Her? I sat up straight.

"Tell me something. Why're they all coming *now*? They say despair. Despair, they say. But they can't all have despaired in the same week. Why're they all coming at the same time? Tell me that."

I regrouped and said, "That's what I've been trying to find out. Apparently, a safe route opened up. Through the Balkans. They're all in touch with one another and then there it was on Facebook."

He went blank or withdrew for a moment, then he returned. "I'll give them bleeding Facebook. I'll give them bleeding Balkans. They ... They've turned their own countries into, into hellholes, quite honestly, and now they're coming



here. And even if they don't start killing us all they're going to want their own ways, aren't they? Halal, isn't it. Mosques. Uh, Sharia. Arranged marriages—for ten-year-old cousins. Yeah, well, they'll have to adapt, and quick about it, too. They'll have to look sharp and bow their heads and fall into line. Socially. On the women question and that."

He closed his computer, and gazed for a moment at its surface.

"You know, I'll have to call her back." And there was now a sudden weak diffidence in his smile as he looked up and said, "It's my mum."

I had to make an effort to dissimulate the scope of my surprise. . . . Shorn of context (the business hotel, the business suit, the expensive orthopedic shoes, like velvet Crocs), his bland round gray-fringed face looked as though it would be happiest, or at least happier, on a village green on a summer afternoon; that face could have belonged to anybody, an alderman, a newsagent, a retired colonel, a vicar. With a nod, I reached for my electronic cigarette and drew on it.

"Eighty-one, she is."

"Ah, well." After a moment, I said, "My mother-in-law's eighty-six." And you see, sir, it's a long story, but she was the reason we left England; and we never regretted it. The process was entirely natural for Elena, and, as for me, there was filial love left over after the death of Hilary Bardwell, and it had nowhere else to go. "My wife's mother. Five years older than yours."

"Yeah? And what's the state of her, then, eh? Can she hold a thought in her head for two minutes? Or is she all over the gaff like mine? I mean, when your bonce goes, I ask you, what is the sense of carrying on?"

I gestured at the instrument he still held in his hand and said, "Just wondering, but what was that—what was that to do with?"

He sat back and grunted it out: "Lanzarote." Sinking deeper, he reached up and eased his writhing neck. "For her eightieth, see, I bought her a beautiful little time-share in Lanzarote. Beautiful little holiday home. Maid looking in every morning. Gardener. Good place to park her in the winter. Roof terrace overlooking the bay. And now she's meant to renew the insurance. That's



*"At first, I was teaching Job a lesson, but now I'm just messing with him."*

• •

all it is. The contents insurance and that. Shouldn't have taken but a minute."

"Well. They do find it hard to . . ."

"You know, I've got four brothers. All younger. And not one of them'll touch her with a bargepole. They won't have anything to do with her. It's true the old—she does drive you mad, there's no question. But you've got to grind it out, haven't you? And the four of them, they won't go near her. Can you credit it? They won't go near their own fucking mum. Pardon the language. Yeah, well, they haven't got my resources, admittedly. So answer me this. Where would she be without her firstborn?"

With a glance at my watch, I said, "Damn. I'd better pack."

"Oh. Long journey?"

"Just the airport. Early tomorrow morning. I thought I'd do it now and try and get a bit more sleep."

"Here for a day or three yet, me. Rest up. Look in at the gym. There's that restaurant I've heard about on the corner. Where're you flying?"

"Home. Nice talking to you."

## II.

As I bunched and crushed various items into the splayed bag, I activated my computer. And saw that there was still no message from my wife (nor from a single one of my children). Yes,

well, it was the same with Nabokov; he went through it, too. "Don't you find our correspondence is a little . . . one-sided?" And, in my case, it was curious, because when I was away like this I never fretted about my other life, my usual life, where everything was nearly always immobile, fixed, site-tenacious.

Otherwise, I felt fine, and even quite vain of my vigor (health, after all, unbroken), and buoyant, and stimulated, and generally happy and proud; the tour had awakened anxiety in me but even the anxiety, I have to say, was not unwelcome, because I recognized it as the kind of anxiety that would ask to be written about. At odd moments, though, I seriously questioned the existence of the house in Brooklyn, with its three female presences (wife, daughters), and I seriously questioned the existence of my two boys and my other daughter, all grown, in London—and my two grandchildren. Could they, could any of them, still be there?

"Good morning, this is your wakeup call. . . . Good morning, this is your wakeup call. . . . Good morning, this is your—"

It was early, and I had one final appointment. A radio interview with a journalist called Konrad Purper; it took place in what they called the Centre d'Affaires, with its swivel seats and cord

carpets. When it was over, Konrad and I stood talking in the foyer until my chaperone promptly but worriedly appeared. There had been many chaperones, many helpers and minders—Alisz, Agata, Heidi, Marguerite, Ana, Hannah, Sophie.

"There are no taxis!" Sophie said. "They can't get near us. Because there's too many people!"

Normally I am very far from being an imperturbable transatlantic traveller. But at that moment I sensed that my wristwatch was moving at its workaday pace; time did not start speeding up, did not start heating up. What was the least good thing that could happen? Nothing much. I said, "So what do we do?"

"Walk."

"To the airport."

"No—sorry. I'm not clear. To the train station. We can get there from there."

"Oh, and the station's close, isn't it?"

"Five minutes," Konrad said. "And every ten minutes a rail shuttle goes to Munich International."

Sophie and I started out, rolling our bags, and with Konrad perhaps coincidentally rolling his bike, and the three of us often rolling aside onto the carless tarmac in deference to the pageant of costumed revelers coming the other way. This narrow thoroughfare, Landwehrstrasse, with its negotiations between West and East—Erotic Studio, Turkish Restaurant, Deutsche Bank, Traditional Thai Massage, Daimler-Benz, Kabul Market. . .

We came out into the air and space of the Karlsplatz, where the stronglimbed mannequins stood in lines or streamed by in biblical numbers—many of the women, in the second week, dec-

adently wearing the despised "Barbie" alternative (a thick-stitched bodice and a much shortened dirndl showing the white stocking tops just above the knee). How did it go in the funfair? According to Thomas Wolfe, they had merry-go-rounds, and an insane profusion of sausage shops, and whole oxen turning on spits. They ate and drank in tents that could seat six thousand, seven thousand, eight thousand. If you were in the middle of this, Wolfe wrote, Germany seemed to be "one enormous belly." Swaying, singing. Germans en masse, objectively ridiculous, and free at last of all irony.

Sophie, I saw, was talking to a policeman stretched out in a parked sidecar. Konrad stood by. She turned and said to me, "It's—you can't even get there by foot!"

For many years I lived in Notting Hill, and sat through many Carnivals (in earlier times, often attending with my sons); I knew about cordons, police gauntlets, closed roads (for ambulance access), and panics and stampedes. Once, I was in a crush that comprehensively assured me that you could face death because of a superfluity of life. Yes, there were affinities: Carnival was like Oktoberfest, but the flesh there was brown and the flesh here was pink. Hundreds of thousands of high-esprit scoutmasters, hundreds of thousands of festive dairymaids in their Sunday best.

"The only way is underground. One stop."

Soon we were looking into the rosy deep of the stone staircase. Getting on for a month ago, in Brooklyn, while she was helping me pack, Elena remarked that my family-sized suitcase was "not full enough." Well, it was certainly heavy

enough, by now, with its sediment of gifts (typically chocolates) and reading matter and things such as Bernhardt's portfolio, in its stiff brown envelope. Humping that big load through the underground—I can do it, I thought, but I won't like doing it. And yet, once again, Konrad, having tethered his bike, was quietly at our side, dark-haired, stocky, and calm, and my bag was now swinging easily in his grip.

In the Hauptbahnhof itself, the crowd was diversified by thin streams of dark-skinned and dark-clothed refugees, their eyes haunted and determined, their tread leaden but firm, dragging their prams and goods-laden strollers, their children. Then came a rare sight, and then an even rarer one.

First, a mother of a certain age, a grandmother, probably, tall, dressed in the rigid black of the full abaya, with her half-veiled face pointed straight ahead. Then, second, a lavishly assimilated young woman with the same coloring, perhaps the granddaughter of a Turkish *Gastarbeiter*, in tight white jacket and tight white jeans—and she had a stupendously, an unignorably full and prominent backside. For half a minute, the two women inadvertently walked in step, away from us: the glide of the black edifice like a towering wheelie, the hugely billowing orbs of white.

When he had pointed us to our platform, Konrad took his leave, much thanked, much praised. I turned to Sophie. "The two women—did you see that?"

"Of course."

"Well. She's not embarrassed by it, is she? Looking so cheerful. Swinging her arms. And dressed like that? She's not trying to hide it."

"No."

"I mean she's not shy about it."

"No," Sophie said. "She likes it."

The Nabokovs were refugees, and three times over. As teen-agers, they independently fled the October Revolution; on her way out, Véra Slonim passed through a pogrom in the Ukraine involving tens of thousands of mob murders. That was in 1919. They fled the Bolsheviks, horsemen of terror and famine, and, via the Crimea, Greece, and England, sought sanctuary—in Berlin. Then France, until the Germans followed them there; then the



*"Don't ask where it comes from. Just be glad I can provide."*



eleventh-hour embarkation to New York, in 1940, a few weeks ahead of the Wehrmacht. (On its next westbound crossing, their boat, the Champlain, was torpedoed and sunk.) V.N.'s father (also Vladimir Nabokov), the liberal statesman, was murdered by a White Russian fascist in Berlin (1922). In the same city, his brother Sergei was arrested in 1943 (for homosexuality) and rearrested the following year (for seditious talk); he died in a concentration camp near Hamburg, in January, 1945. That was their Europe; and they went back there, in style and for good, in 1959.

Yes, and I met Véra, too. I spent most of a day with her, in 1983, in the still center of Europe, the Palace Hotel in Montreux, Switzerland (where they had lived since 1961), breaking only for lunch with her son, the incredibly tall Dmitri, whom I would meet again. Véra was a riveting and convivial golden-skinned beauty; on sensitive subjects she could turn dauntingly fierce, but I was never really frightened, because I thought there was always the light of contingent humor in her eyes.

Vladimir died in 1977, aged seventy-eight. Véra died in 1991, aged eighty-nine. And Dmitri died in 2012, aged seventy-seven.

He was childless. And now his ashes (marking the closure of this genetic line) are interred with those of his parents, in the cemetery in Montreux.

I got to Munich International with an extra half hour to spare. And there in the terminal, bathed in watery early-morning light, behind the little rampart of his luggage (a squat gunmetal suitcase, a tan valise with numerous zips and pouches), and leering into his cell phone, stood Geoffrey the businessman. I greeted him and said, "Why are you here? I thought you were going to take it easy for a few days."

"Who, me? Me? I should be so blessed. Nah. Her fucking bungalow burnt down last night. Electrics. It's always electrics. Burnt down to the fucking ground."

"Really? She wasn't in it, was she?"

"Her? No, snug as a bug in Sheffield, thanks very much. It's muggins here that has to go to fucking Lanzarote. See if we got any contents insurance. Or any insurance at all."

"Will it be hard to get to Lanzarote?"

His face narrowed shrewdly. "You know what you do when something like this happens? When you're a bit stranded? You go down under. Under here." And he soundlessly tapped his padded shoe on the floor. "That's where the airline offices are. Under here. You go down there and you go around and you sniff out the best deal."

"Well, good luck."

"Oh, I'll be all right. It's only money."



So there was time for lots of coffee and for delicious and fattening croissants in the lounge. Then the brand-new, hangar-fresh Lufthansa jumbo jet took off, on schedule. Soon I was gorging myself on fine foods and choice wines, before relishing "Alien" (Ridley Scott) and then the sequel, "Aliens" (James Cameron). I landed punctually. Would-be immigrants and even asylum-seekers often had to wait two years, but after two hours, in the admittedly inhospitable environs of Immigration, I was allowed into America.

### III.

And what I returned to, eerily and almost tremulously, still held, Elena and the daughters—who went far and wide, as they pleased, who boldly roamed Manhattan, where their grandmother (I now heard it confirmed) was still installed in the deluxe sunset home that, very understandably, she kept mistaking for a hotel.

How solid it all was, this other existence. How advanced, how evolved, with its devices, its machines, which all seemed to work. How tightly joined to the earth it was, with its steel and concrete, the five-story house on Strong Place.

The anxiety in me was deeply layered and durable, because it went back to before I was born. Coming to terms with this involved work of mind, most of it done in darkness. I

was home in America, the immigrant nation, stretching from sea to shining sea, and I couldn't sleep. "Night is always a giant," the champion insomniac Nabokov wrote in "Transparent Things," "but this one was especially terrible." I had another book on my bedside table, a short, stylish study by the historian Mark Mazower, called "Dark Continent," and I would sometimes go to the next room with that for an hour, before defeatedly returning.

When I closed my eyes, I was met by the usual sights—an abstract battlefield or dismantled fairground at dusk, flowers in monochrome, figures cut out of limp white paper. And the thoughts and images verged encouragingly on the nonsensical. But no—my mind was in too low a gear for the cruise control of unconsciousness. . . .

And so many possible futures were queuing up and jockeying to be born. And, in time, one or other of them would go thundering clear of the rest.

And they were coming here, the refugees, in the eye of a geohistorical convergence—their exodus on the one hand, and, on the other, Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab and Boko Haram and the Taliban and Sinai Province and ISIS.

And even now it was as if a tectonic force had taken hold of Europe and, using its fingernails, had lifted it up and tilted it, politically, causing a heavy mudslide in the direction of old illusions, old dreams of purity and cruelty.

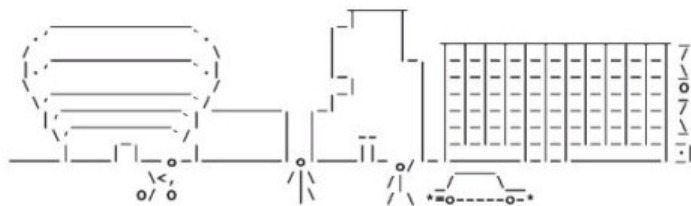
And that force would get heavier still, much heavier, immediately and irreversibly, after the first incidence of *takfir*. And then Europe—that by now famously unrobust confederation—would, in fact, meet its "historic test."

And what they might be bringing, the refugees, was insignificant when set against what was already there, in the host nations, the spores and middens of what was already there. . . . "Dark Continent" is not a book about Africa; the rest of Mazower's title is "Europe's Twentieth Century." ♦

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Martin Amis on Europe's crises.

# THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

## THE SHADOW

*A hundred years of Orson Welles.*

BY ALEX ROSS

The most popular Orson Welles video on YouTube, edging out the trailer for “Citizen Kane” and “The War of the Worlds” broadcast of 1938, is called “Orson Welles Drunk Outtake.” It shows him slurring his way through one of those ads in which he intoned, “Paul Masson will sell no wine before its time.” Whether he was drunk, experiencing the effects of medication (he suffered from diabetes and other ailments), or simply very tired is immaterial. What’s striking about the video is its popularity. This is largely how today’s culture has chosen to remember Welles: as a pompous wreck, a man who peaked early and then devolved into hackwork and bloated fiascos.

The video points to a decades-old fissure in the reputation of Welles, whose centennial fell on May 6th. The film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, the author of the 2007 book “Discovering Orson Welles,” observes that commentary tends to fall into “partisan” and “adversarial” categories—adversarial meaning a tendency to celebrate the early work while detecting portents of disaster. Pauline Kael’s long essay “Raising Kane,” which appeared in this magazine, in 1971, propagated that view: she praised “Kane” effusively but attributed many of its best features to the screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz and other collaborators. After that film, Kael wrote, Welles “flew apart, became disorderly.” A 1985 biography by Charles Higham condensed the standard story into its subtitle: “Orson Welles: The Rise and Fall of an American Genius.”

The partisans, bemoaning the fixation on “Kane,” highlight later entries in the canon. Following Welles’s own preference, they often name the 1965 Falstaff film, “Chimes at Midnight,” as his greatest achievement. Like so many obsessives, they acknowledge one another with secret handshakes, making reference to obscure or nonexistent works: the radio show “His Honor the Mayor,” the TV pilot “The Fountain of Youth,” the work print of the unfinished nineteen-seventies film “The Other Side of the Wind,” the lost ending of “The Magnificent Ambersons.” A raft of new books in the centennial year, together with publications from the past decade, suggests that the partisans are slowly gaining ground.

Enthusiasts and skeptics agree that Welles has a way of slipping from one’s grasp. On one hand, he spun tales of damaged power: a newspaper tycoon rises from poverty and ends in desolation; a cop fakes evidence in order to convict people he thinks to be guilty; a macho director secretly longs for the young male stars of his pictures. Truffaut once described Welles’s work as a meditation on the “weakness of the strong.” On the other hand, the movies take life from the margins, from the grotesques in the background. “Touch of Evil” becomes sublime at the moment when Marlene Dietrich saunters into view, as the proprietor of a Mexican brothel that echoes with skeletal player-piano music. The films are full of plays within plays, screens upon screens; an incessant flicker of shadows on walls reminds us that we

are looking at projected images. All this comes to a head in the late-period masterpiece “F for Fake,” a study of hoaxes that itself turns out to be a hoax.

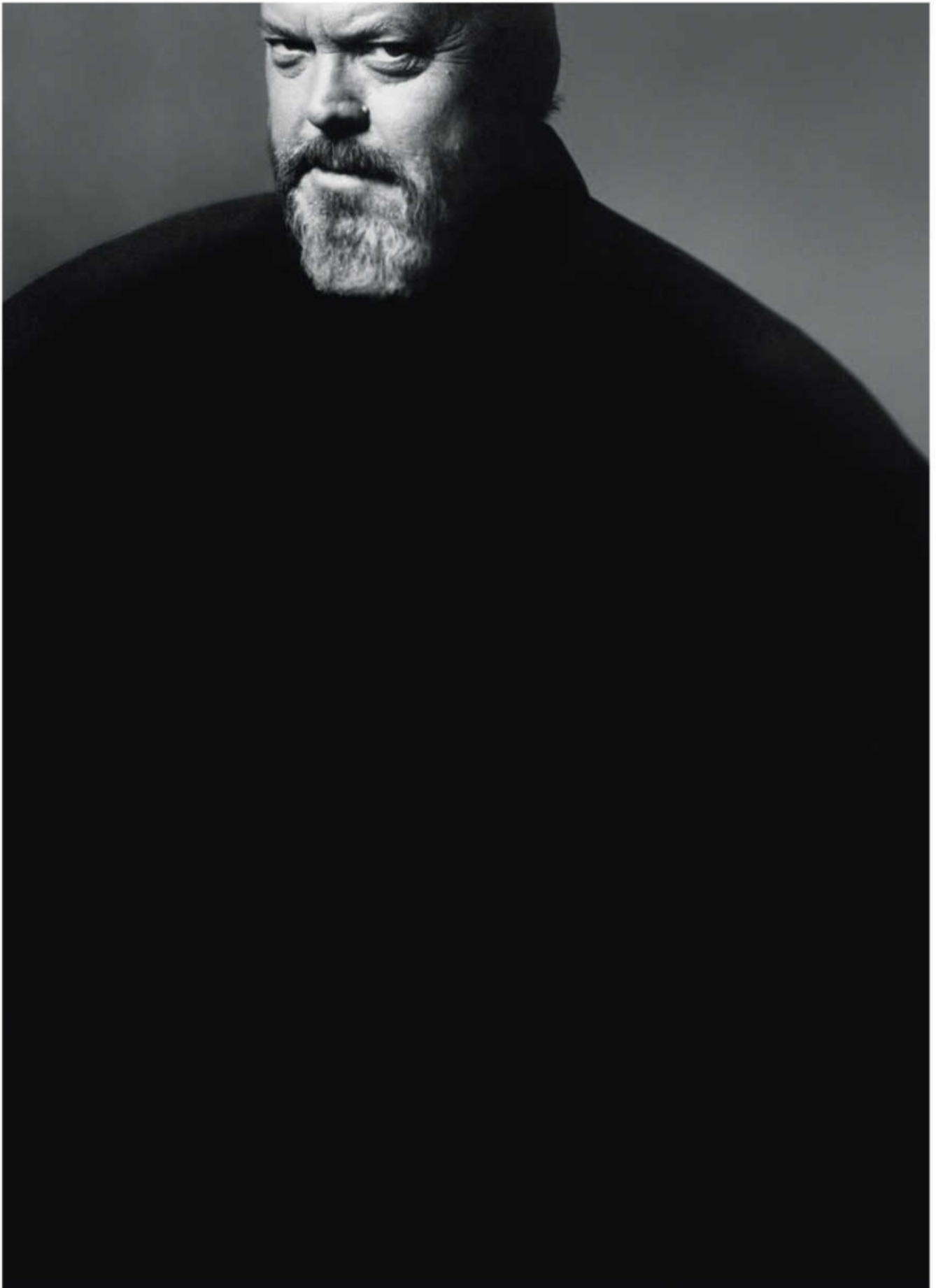
Welles causes endless trouble because of his unstable place in the American cultural hierarchy of high and low. He loved tragedy and vaudeville, Expressionist cinema and boys’ adventure stories. He converted genre vehicles like “Touch of Evil” into surreal labyrinths; he made “Macbeth” look like Gothic horror. He was a subversive populist, a celebrity avant-gardist. He was also, frequently, a political artist, one who came of age during the heyday of the Popular Front and never ceased to roil the culture industry. Despite acres of commentary, much about him remains relatively unexplored: his identification with African-Americans, his investigation of sexual ambiguities. In a strange way, he is still active, still working; if, as is hoped, a completed version of “The Other Side of the Wind” soon emerges, he may confound us once again.

The familiar part of the Welles saga, his rapid rise to the pinnacle of “Kane,” has been told many times, most stylishly in Simon Callow’s 1995 book, “Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu”—the first of three biographical volumes to date, with a fourth to follow. But Patrick McGilligan’s “Young Orson: The Years of Luck and Genius on the Path to ‘Citizen Kane’” (HarperCollins), the product of years of meticulous research, may be the definitive account. It reveals, among other things, that Welles’s reputation as a self-mythologizer is itself a bit of a myth: quite a few improbable anecdotes turn out to be more or less true. Did Welles see Sarah Bernhardt perform in Chicago? Did he make his stage debut as Sorrow, the child in “Madama Butterfly,” at the Ravinia Festival? Absolute confirmation is lacking, but the chronologies line up. (A detail from the Chicago *Tribune*: at a 1919 performance of “Butterfly,” an unnamed child of unusual heft substituted as Sorrow, causing giggles in the audience.)

Welles was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin. His father, Richard, was a charming, dissipated inventor who worked for a manufacturer of bicycle lamps; his mother, Beatrice Ives Welles, was a pianist and an activist. Welles’s worldliness

ABOVE: JENNIFER DANIEL; OPPOSITE: SKREBESKI





*Welles causes endless trouble because of his unstable place in the American cultural hierarchy of high and low.*

evidently stemmed from his father, his artistic gifts and radical tendencies from his mother. McGilligan, who has written biographies of Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, and Nicholas Ray, has combed through newspaper archives and unearthed many new details of Beatrice's activities, which included suffragist campaigns and a stint on the Kenosha school board. Beatrice died in 1924, of hepatitis, just after Orson's ninth birthday. Richard lived for six more years, his health ruined by alcoholism. Maurice Bernstein, a social-climbing Chicago doctor who had befriended the couple, became Orson's guardian, shuttling him around while engaging in a flurry of high-profile affairs.

Welles attended the Todd School for Boys, in Woodstock, Illinois, and the school's headmaster, Roger Hill, became a father figure to him. In school plays, Welles directed, designed sets, made costumes, and acted a slew of roles, including Christ, Judas, and the Virgin Mary. Shortly after graduating from Todd, at the age of sixteen, Welles persuaded Bernstein to let him travel alone to Ireland, and soon made his professional acting debut at the Gate Theatre, in Dublin. His success was reported in the *New York Times*, which called him "amazingly fine." By 1934, when he was nineteen, he had made his Broadway debut, as Tybalt in "Romeo and Juliet." He had also married the actress Virginia Nicolson—the first of three less than happy marriages, yielding three not always happy daughters. His oldest child, Chris Welles Feder, records his inadequacies as a father in her affecting, forgiving 2009 memoir, "In My Father's Shadow."

Welles's almost overnight emergence as the boy genius of the American theatre is often attributed to luck. He himself said so, and "luck" appears in McGilligan's subtitle. But the decisive factor was the cultural-political atmosphere of the mid-thirties. For the only time in American history, the government was generously funding the arts, by way of the Works Progress Administration, and radio networks and movie studios were cultivating "quality" or "prestige" projects. During this period, Toscanini became a star of NBC radio and several Thomas Mann novels became Book-of-the-Month Club selections. Neither Callow nor McGilligan does full justice to the

New Deal underpinnings of Welles's career; for that, you have to turn to Michael Denning's 1996 book, "The Cultural Front," which presents Welles as the "American Brecht," or to James Naremore's classic study "The Magic World of Orson Welles," recently reissued by the University of Illinois.

Welles's entrée was the Federal Theatre Project, which tended to take a hard-left, Popular Front line, and pointedly boosted African-American theatre. The F.T.P.'s New York Negro Unit fell into the hands of the Romanian-born, British-educated producer John Houseman, who had admired Welles's Tybalt. At the end of 1935, the idea arose of mounting an all-black "Macbeth," and Houseman invited Welles to direct it. The Voodoo "Macbeth," as it became known, set the template for Wellesian theatre: a displacing concept (the action was moved to a Caribbean island reminiscent of Haiti in the era of Henri Christophe); stark, eerie lighting; ruthless editing. Welles and Houseman subsequently formed an F.T.P. unit called Project 891, which launched Marc Blitzstein's pro-union musical, "The Cradle Will Rock." In 1937, as the F.T.P. came under political attack, Welles and Houseman founded the independent Mercury Theatre. Their first production, a "Julius Caesar" in a Fascist setting, was a sensation, and Welles soon landed on the cover of *Time*.

By many accounts, the most electrifying moment in "Caesar" was the brief scene in which Cinna the Poet is mistaken for one of the conspirators and is set upon by a mob. Remarkably, the actor who played Cinna, Norman Lloyd, is still around, at the age of a hundred and one, and has vivid memories of his work with Welles.

The staging of the scene was, typically, a last-minute improvisation, a conjuration out of chaos. Lloyd described to me the end result: "As the mob begins to move in very slowly, I don't hear them. I look around, and I'm surprised: there are a lot of people around me. And what I played was, that I thought they wanted my poems. So I took the poem out and offered it to the lead guy. . . . And then Orson *moved in* as a director. He said, 'Take it from him and hit him! *Throw 'em at him! Throw 'em at him!*' I said, 'No, I'm Cinna the Poet.' Orson gave it its contour: the move around the stage—

they're following me, following me all the time—and my realization, finally, that this was *death*. I disappear in the crowd as they rush me down the ramp." Lloyd concluded, "This scene reflected what was happening in the world at the time very much. The audience *got* it. This is Fascism on the streets."

**I**n the same period, Welles achieved radio stardom as a hypnosis-inducing vigilante on "The Shadow." Revenue from this and other radio appearances was funnelled into his F.T.P. shows, causing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to joke that Welles was the "only operator in history who ever illegally siphoned money *into* a Washington project." Welles pushed radio in a more artistically ambitious direction with his "Mercury Theatre on the Air," adapting Shakespeare, Dickens, "Dracula," and dozens of other literary properties. Bernard Herrmann joined Welles as house composer, and later followed him to Hollywood, becoming the magus of film music.

The night before Halloween, 1938, Welles and his staff perpetrated the most notorious hour of radio in the history of the medium: "The War of the Worlds," which dramatized the H. G. Wells novel as a breaking-news broadcast, and convinced a certain number of Americans that Martians had invaded. As A. Brad Schwartz shows in "Broadcast Hysteria: Orson Welles's 'War of the Worlds' and the Art of Fake News" (Hill & Wang), the audience was duped largely by the pacing. Welles made the opening deliberately humdrum, stretching out a fake music broadcast by "Ramón Raquelo and His Orchestra"—Herrmann's musicians, galumphing awkwardly. Then a voice broke in with reports of peculiar astronomical sightings and odd events in Grover's Mill, New Jersey. A reporter described, in the manner of the Hindenburg-disaster broadcast, tentacled creatures crawling out of a crashed vessel. The announcer signed off; there was Chopin piano music; the announcer returned ("Ladies and gentlemen, am I on?"), but his voice was soon drowned out amid screams; there was six seconds of dead air; another announcer apologized for technical difficulties; Chopin tinkled on. It had the jagged rhythm of the real.

Schwartz is not the first to point out that the legend of a nationwide panic is



exaggerated. Only between two and four per cent of the radio audience tuned in that night, and only a fraction of those listeners went berserk. At the Welles archive at the University of Michigan, Schwartz studied more than a thousand letters related to “The War of the Worlds.” Supporters outnumbered critics ten to one; quite a few listeners admitted to being fooled but added that they had enjoyed the fright. One began by addressing Welles as “You horrible, terrible person” and ended by saying, “I must say it was marvelous.” Schwartz concludes that rumors of all-out panic were fanned by print commentators who wished to ponder the gullibility of the masses and the unreliability of the radio medium—much as pundits fret over the Internet today. “Bedlam did reign that night, but only in newsrooms across America,” Schwartz writes.

For a few days, it seemed that Welles would be punished and that the F.C.C. would implement new restrictions. In the end, though, “The War of the Worlds” had the effect of rallying opinion against censorship. Many people defended Welles’s right to run amok: it was the American way. The Campbell Soup Company signed on as a sponsor, and R.K.O. Radio Pictures invited Welles to Hollywood. As Schwartz observes, this was an ironic outcome: corporate interests proved to be a vigorous censor of unorthodox ideas.

“Kane” was not Welles’s first movie. Among several early attempts, the most notable were silent-film segments that he shot as a supplement to a Mercury production of William Gillette’s farce “Too Much Johnson.” The footage went unused because of logistical difficulties, and later disappeared. Inexplicably, it turned up a few years ago, at a warehouse in Pordenone, Italy. As Richard Brody has pointed out on [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com), the film pays tribute to the slapstick of Mack Sennett and Harold Lloyd but also anticipates future Welles imagery: extreme low-angle shots frame Joseph Cotten against the Manhattan skyline. The footage undercuts the assumption that Welles’s cinematic style was formed under the tutelage of Gregg Toland, the virtuoso cinematographer of “Kane.”

McGilligan ends his book just as Welles begins shooting “Kane,” but he

gives a lucid account of the film’s origins, correcting the impression given in Kael’s “Raising Kane.” (In 1978, the scholar Robert Carringer dismantled the idea that Mankiewicz should be considered the sole author of “Kane,” but the notion has not died out.) Mankiewicz supplied the central conceit of a newspaper tycoon modelled on William Randolph Hearst, but many motifs are drawn from earlier Welles projects. A play called “Marching Song,” which he wrote with Roger Hill, is framed as a journalistic quest to understand a contradictory historical figure (in this case, John Brown); in an unfiled script titled “The Smiler with the Knife,” a right-wing tycoon is introduced, as in “Kane,” with a newsreel. Mankiewicz invented vibrant characters and dialogue, but the first draft, titled “American,” meanders. Welles’s revision is a savagely deft feat of editing in which scene after scene comes alive through ingenious compression. In a famous sequence of cuts, Mr. Thatcher, Charles Foster Kane’s guardian, is seen exclaiming, “Merry Christmas . . . and a Happy New Year!” There is a jump of nearly two decades in the middle of the phrase.

Members of the adversarial camp assert that, after “Kane,” Welles fell victim to self-indulgence. In late 1941 and early 1942, he filmed “The Magnificent Ambersons,” an ethereally melancholy story of a Midwestern family in decline. It should have been his magnum opus, but,



we are told, Welles absconded to Brazil before he was done with it, frittering away money on “It’s All True,” an omnibus film emphasizing racial and cultural multiplicity in Latin America. The studio that financed Mercury Productions, R.K.O., lost patience and shut down the operation. “There was never a movie there, only an extravagant, self-destructive gesture,” David Thomson writes in his 1996 book, “Rosebud.” Meanwhile, “Ambersons” was drastically re-cut and

re-shot without Welles’s participation.

Catherine Benamou’s 2007 book, “It’s All True,” a masterpiece of scholarship, presents the Latin-American project as visionary filmmaking, austere in its technique and radical in its politics. It arose not from idle fancy but from a wartime imperative: the Roosevelt Administration was worried about Fascist incursions in South America, and kept a close eye on Getúlio Vargas, Brazil’s authoritarian President. Welles initially went to Brazil to film the Carnival in Rio; R.K.O. and the Brazilian government expected a colorful entertainment, suitable for propaganda. But he became fascinated by the story of the *jangadeiros*—four raft fishermen, from the north of Brazil, who, the previous year, had sailed sixteen hundred miles along the coast to Rio, dramatizing the need for improved labor conditions. Welles also embraced Brazilian culture, becoming aware of the Afro-Brazilian origins of samba. He emerged with an ambitious plan for a musical-cultural-political overview of Brazilian life.

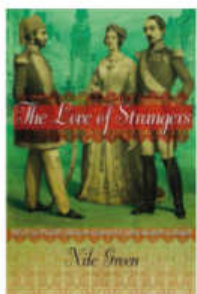
Benamou gives a sense of what the samba sequences would have been like. In one, we see musicians in a favela playing “Se Alguém Disse”; then we cut to a high-class night club, where the same tune is heard in a polished, radio-ready version. Other scenes would have revolved around the song “Adeus, Praça Onze” (“Farewell, Square Eleven”), the hit of the 1942 Carnival. It told of a plan to pave over a plaza in Rio that was beloved by samba players. Too much color footage is lost to permit a full reconstruction of these scenes. But in 1993 a documentary also titled “It’s All True”—initiated by Welles’s longtime associate Richard Wilson—presented rich-hued, shadow-drenched Technicolor shots of the Carnival that are unlike the clean, bright palette of “The Wizard of Oz” and other early color films.

This film essay on race, inequality, and gentrification failed to please R.K.O., whose strategy of making “prestige” pictures was foundering in wartime. An on-site R.K.O. representative named Lynn Shores was bothered by Welles’s habit of turning his cameras toward the darker, poorer faces of Brazil. According to one memo, Shores went around complaining that the “whole thing’s about a bunch of niggers.” Benamou establishes that

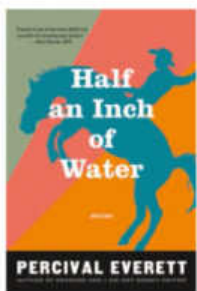
## BRIEFLY NOTED



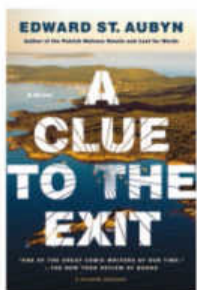
**THE ONLY STREET IN PARIS**, by Elaine Sciolino (*Norton*). After recent events, it's easy to feel that the "real" Paris lies beyond the streets that foreigners love. Yet, as a genre, the American-in-Paris memoir has proved hardy in weathering the vicissitudes of history, as this new entry demonstrates. Sciolino, a former *Times* Paris bureau chief, focusses on the lively Rue des Martyrs, on the Right Bank. The narrative takes the form of a ramble through shops, courtyards, cabarets, and time, revealing a street somewhat unique but also representative, in the polite but exacting attitudes and customs of its inhabitants. Sciolino's sharply observed account serves as a testament to the persistence of old Paris—the city of light, of literature, of life itself.



**THE LOVE OF STRANGERS**, by Nile Green (*Princeton*). In 1815, six young Iranian students began a fact-finding mission in England, hoping to help their nation withstand Russian aggression. The men studied the latest in science and military technology, and returned home with a printing press, a telescope, medical equipment, and books. Green, drawing on a diary kept by one of them, vividly describes their four-year quest, including encounters with orientalist, evangelicals, and tradesmen. He is also eager to demonstrate "quotidian camaraderie and personal attachments" between the Muslim students and the English. The students' extracurricular activities included, variously, initiation into Freemasonry, aspiring to an Oxford education, marrying an English girl, helping translate the Bible into Persian.



**HALF AN INCH OF WATER**, by Percival Everett (*Graywolf*). This agile short-story collection explores the intersection of the everyday and the surreal in the American West. Characters grapple with mysteries that border on the miraculous: a deaf Native American girl sits untouched in a wreath of rattlesnakes; an elderly woman sees her dead dog returned as a springy young puppy; and a teen-ager lands a monstrous, mythical trout from the same creek where his sister drowned. Everett's spare prose both anchors the supernatural flourishes and binds the collection together, as constant as the landscape. One character says, "You can kill everything, you can tear it all up and build, you can pipe water into it, but the desert is the desert, more desert every day."



**A CLUE TO THE EXIT**, by Edward St. Aubyn (*Picador*). Part meditation on consciousness, part extravagant farce, this novella follows a schlocky screenwriter with only six months to live. He is intent on writing something meaningful before he dies, and the resulting novel, set on a train that has broken down between Oxford and London, is nestled within the story of his final months, as he fritters away his money at Mediterranean resorts. The "fictional" snippets can feel ponderous; the writer, anxious about ideas of consciousness and mortality, says, "I suppose I'll have to burden my characters with more ruminations on this subject." But the novella's strength lies in descriptions of the act of writing, and its ability to mediate these anxieties.

Shores's reports to R.K.O. misrepresented the filming schedule in order to portray Welles as irresponsible.

By July, 1942, Mercury Productions had lost R.K.O.'s support, but Welles lingered in Brazil, stubbornly filming the *jangadeiros* sequence. That May, Jacaré, the charismatic leader of the fishermen, had drowned during filming; Welles, determined to honor him, carried on with Jacaré's brother as a stand-in. Welles made do with a crew of five and a budget of ten thousand dollars. Lacking electricity on location, he worked in natural light. Far from being inhibited by these limitations, he thrived on them, extending the guerrilla mode of making pictures that he had tested with "Too Much Johnson." In a funeral scene, long lines of figures wend their way along a hill, against a brilliant clear sky. In one shot, you see the trudging feet of mourners in the foreground while those on the ridge behind move in the opposite direction—the kind of visual counterpoint that makes Welles's films an elemental joy to watch.

Simon Callow is an actor-director-author whose polymath panache rivals Welles's, and as his immense biography has inched forward it has undergone an evolution. The epic has been told with unstinting verve, but the first volume suffered from an admonishing tone, spotty acknowledgment of political context, and an overreliance on Houseman's embittered testimony (the partnership ended in 1941). The second volume, "Hello Americans," which appeared in 2006 and covered the years 1941 to 1947, highlighted Welles's predicament as an engaged artist in an increasingly hostile environment. Notwithstanding Welles's myriad flaws—his bombast, his temper, his disdain for the realities of money, and, most damaging, his habit of going into hiding when crisis loomed—Callow has come to see the latter part of the career as "a tale of heroism, not of self-destruction."

When Welles returned from Brazil, he was seething with political rage, and the fury endured until he went into European exile, in 1947. Popular Front values were in retreat, but Welles persisted in articulating them. His boldest statements came on a short-lived radio show called "Orson Welles Commentaries." In early 1946, a black veteran named



Isaac Woodard, Jr., had been beaten and blinded by the police chief of Batesburg, South Carolina. A few months later, Welles read aloud Woodard's affidavit on the air and then addressed the sheriff, whose name was not yet known, in the manner of a Shakespearean comic-book avenger: "Wash your hands, Officer X, wash them well. Scrub and scour. You won't blot out the blood of a blinded war veteran. . . . You'll never wash away that leprous lack of pigment, the guilty pallor of the white man." After several more broadcasts on this theme, the show was cancelled.

Welles's films took a turn toward the baroque, the circus-like. The storied fun-house shoot-out at the climax of "The Lady from Shanghai" (1947)—in which Rita Hayworth, Welles's second wife, plays a luridly blond femme fatale and Welles her naïve Irish stooge—is an almost comically blatant assault on the Hollywood dream factory. Mirror images of the stars shatter as bullets fly. Welles's film of "Macbeth" (1948) presents a calculatedly cold, vicious version of Shakespeare, with stagey whispers and bloodcurdling screams echoing in a cavernous acoustic space. During this period, Laurence Olivier was winning acclaim for his well-schooled adaptations of "Henry V" and "Hamlet." As the scholar Michael Anderegg has observed, Welles's unruly and anarchic Shakespeare was out of step with Cold War middle-brow culture.

Scholars debate whether Welles's departure for Italy, in the late forties, was impelled by the approaching McCarthyite storm. Most likely, the possibility of being called before the House Un-American Activities Committee played a role. Welles became a gypsy artist who never tied himself to one place or institution for long. More often than not, he financed projects with acting paychecks. He returned to America for brief periods—notably to make "Touch of Evil" (1958), his definitive denunciation of police brutality against minorities—but could not regain his footing in Hollywood.

Callow's latest book, "Orson Welles: One-Man Band" (Jonathan Cape/Viking), covers the gypsy years. The biographer summons his subject with easy authority, his descriptions poised between sympathy and skepticism: "One senses something archaic about him. He be-

haves like some great tribal chieftain, a warlord of art, riding roughshod over the niceties of conventional behavior, sometimes sulking in his tent, sometimes rousing his people to great heights, now making huge strategic decisions off the cuff, now mysteriously absenting himself." As before, Callow is especially good at evoking Welles's theatre work. There are lively pages on the 1955 production "Moby-Dick Rehearsed," which depicted a nineteenth-century theatre troupe preparing a stage version of Melville's novel, and on a 1950 Faust revue that featured Eartha Kitt as Helen of Troy, and music by Duke Ellington. Such projects veered between triumph and catastrophe, sometimes on the same night. Callow notes that at one performance of "King Lear," in New York, Welles's bellowing on the heath included the words "John! John!! John!!! Switch sixteen is not on!"

There are many delights in Welles's European films—the knotty whimsy of "Mr. Arkadin," the florid weirdness of "The Trial"—but Shakespeare elicited his best. "Othello," an unusually tortuous undertaking, which began in 1948 and was finished in 1951, somehow achieves a commanding stylistic unity, with airy, luminous vistas set against dank, claustrophobic interiors. Welles plays Othello, and the contained violence of the portrayal suggests a man hyper-conscious of how he is being seen, particularly as a black person in a white society. In "Chimes at Midnight," Welles assumes the role of Falstaff, which he had first played in his youth. As Callow writes, it is one of Welles's "richest, most detailed, most human performances." The devastation that passes over his face in the rejection scene from "Henry IV, Part 2"—"I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers"—hints at Welles's own humiliation by worldly authorities. But the most resonant scene is the Battle of Shrewsbury—a quick-cut barrage of mayhem that devolves into unsightly images of bodies twitching in mud. At the time, the Vietnam War was escalating, and the political message was clear: war has always been a quagmire.

**A**rtists do their best work when they're old or young," Welles once told his younger colleague Peter Bogdanovich. "Middle age is the enemy of art." Welles never got to have a full-fledged late

period: in the twenty years after "Chimes," he was unable to complete a feature-length narrative film. But you can see a late style emerging if you plunge into the trove that he left behind: "F for Fake" and other smaller-scale efforts; scripts in the Michigan archive; conjectural versions of several unfinished films, realized by Stefan Droessler, of the Munich Film Museum; and fragments of "The Other Side of the Wind," which circulate among fans. The film historian Joseph McBride, in his 2006 book, "What Ever Happened to Orson Welles?," calls Welles's final decades a "period of great artistic fecundity and daring," one that placed new emphasis on the disordering power of sexual desire.

Welles was by then on his third marriage, to the Italian actress Paola Mori. (Their daughter, Beatrice, manages his estate.) He had also entered into a close relationship with the Croatian sculptor and actress Oja Kodar, who became his co-screenwriter and chief collaborator. Kodar helped to bring about a burst of sensuality in Welles's work. The shift is first seen in "The Immortal Story," an hour-long film based on an Isak Dinesen tale, which was shown on French television in 1968 and is now finally available on DVD and Blu-ray. The Wellesian baroque gives way to an aesthetic of long-held shots, nocturnal stillness, and softly glowing colors. The central sex scene, between characters played by Jeanne Moreau and the young British actor Norman Eshley, is never explicit, and yet it achieves a voluptuous intensity at its climax, with Eshley arcing his body upward and Moreau gasping. As so often in Welles's work, the imagery is accented by the sound: amid the noise of writhing bodies, we hear an ostinato of crickets.

The vortex of desire is at the center of "The Other Side of the Wind," which occupied Welles from 1970 to 1976. Josh Karp's "Orson Welles's Last Movie: The Making of 'The Other Side of the Wind'" (St. Martin's) gives a dynamic account of the film's making and eventual undoing. The principal character is Jake Hannaford, played by John Huston—a bigoted, reactionary director who is trying to ape the latest trends. His film-in-progress, also called "The Other Side of the Wind," is a languid enigma in the manner of Antonioni, with Kodar cast as a Native American radical. Hannaford has

a history of discovering, befriending, and discarding young male actors; the latest is an androgynous youth named John Dale (played by Bob Random), who is subjected to emasculating directorial insults while filming his sex scenes with Kodar's character, and ends up walking off the picture. The plot unfolds on Hannaford's seventieth birthday, as colleagues, critics, documentarians, and hangers-on—including a Bogdanovich-like younger director, played by Bogdanovich—gather to celebrate him. Before dawn, Hannaford dies in a mysterious car crash, as his unfinished movie plays at a deserted drive-in.

The question of Hannaford's sexuality smolders throughout. In one provisional sequence, Hannaford gay-baits Dr. Burroughs, an effete, elderly schoolmaster who once taught Dale. For a while, Burroughs holds his own, archly noting Hannaford's own "personal interest" in the young man. Hannaford splutters with rage, his face blackened by shadow—a device familiar from "Kane." With a sadistic grin, he invites Burroughs to go for a swim, and orders him to undress. "I suppose all schoolteachers are prigs," the affronted teacher says. "I suppose," Hannaford answers. "Prigs, or faggots." Huston's icy, raw, alcohol-fuelled performance exposes the psychological violence at the root of power.

If Welles had pulled it off, "Wind" would have been a death-defying trick: a comeback picture about a doomed director who can't finish his comeback picture. By 1975, he had shot the script and edited forty-two minutes of film; but, having spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of his own money, he needed additional funds to complete the job. That year, he received a Life Achievement award from the American Film Institute, and he showed a few scenes, hoping for offers of end money. None came—unsurprisingly, Karp notes, since the excerpts betrayed disdain for Hollywood. Meanwhile, Welles quarrelled with his producers, the Paris-based Astrophore company, which was headed by Mehdi Boushehri, a brother-in-law of the Shah of Iran. Four years later, the Shah was deposed, and the film entered legal limbo; at one point, representatives of Ayatollah Khomeini threatened to seize it.

After Welles's death, in 1985, Bog-

danovich and other Welles associates made attempts to complete "Wind," but disputes over rights and financing kept getting in the way. Finally, last year, a team led by Bogdanovich and the producers Frank Marshall and Filip Jan Rymysa secured the Astrophore interest and seemed to win agreement from Kodar and other parties. There have been further delays, but preparations continue. In the world of Welles, nothing ever goes according to plan.

Even when work on "Wind" begins, daunting challenges will remain. In each of his films, Welles found a distinct editing tempo, suited to its themes. His "Wind" scenes suggest two tempos interwoven. The birthday party has a frenzied, scrambled energy; 16-mm. film, Super 8, video, and stills are interspliced, representing the different media eyes trained on Hannaford. The cutting is sometimes dizzyingly rapid, incorporating multiple takes. Gary Graver, Welles's cinematographer in the later years, recalled him shouting, "Fast! Fast! Don't bore anyone!" The film-within-a-film, shot in 35-mm. Kodak Eastmancolor, is more luxuriously paced. Although it was conceived as a parody, it contains wondrous images. A sex scene shot in a car, in which Random writhes with Kodar as rain streams down the windows, is among Welles's most astonishing feats. No one can know exactly how he would have handled this interplay of rhythms, but even a speculative version will show a febrile creative imagination.

On the evening of October 9, 1985, Welles spoke by phone with Roger Hill, his high-school mentor. He read aloud a letter that he had received from a theatrical manager fifty-three years earlier, concerning his and Hill's play "Marching Song." The letter said, "It's a swell show. It makes good reading. . . . But that doesn't matter. It won't make money. It isn't a commercial piece." Welles then said to Hill, "Disappointments continue to affect my confidence—but never my resolve." (A reconstruction of the conversation, drawn from Hill's recollection, appears in Todd Tarbox's absorbing 2013 book, "Orson Welles and Roger Hill.") Toward the end of the call, Welles described himself as a "shipwreck . . . too busy to be destroyed, let alone sink." He

quoted "Cymbeline": "Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered." Then he said, "A phone is ringing. It's a money call I must take." He died a few hours later, alone, at his typewriter.

Money bedevilled Welles to the end. He had terrible business instincts, alienating reliable investors while falling prey to hucksters. What's remarkable, though, is how little money he ultimately spent. "Chimes" had a smaller budget, in unadjusted dollars, than "Kane," released twenty-four years earlier. He rarely spent more than a million dollars per picture, even as inflation made this amount worth less and less. If one Welles myth deserves to die, it is that he was a wasteful filmmaker. His career is, in fact, a sustained demonstration of the art of making something from nothing. It might be time to stop imagining what might have been and instead to focus on what remains. As Jonathan Rosenbaum points out, no one goes around saying, "What happened to Kafka?" Making art is difficult, especially in a culture that has cooled on grand artistic ambitions. These tidy parables of rise and fall, of genius unrealized, may say more about latter-day America than they do about the ever-beleaguered, never-defeated Welles.

If he left a testament, it is "F for Fake," which anticipated the more personal documentary filmmaking of recent decades. Welles begins with a flurry of vignettes on the subject of hoaxes, drawing on footage shot by François Reichenbach: we see the debonair art forger Elmyr de Hory; his wily biographer, Clifford Irving, who proceeds to launch a hoax of his own, in the form of the diaries of Howard Hughes; and Welles himself, recalling the "War of the Worlds" uproar. To this is added an elaborate cinematic ruse, the nature of which should be withheld from those who haven't seen it yet. What begins as a droll, breezy exercise becomes a magisterial meditation on art and life, truth and fiction. Welles seems to side with his bitterest critics by describing himself as a liar, a faker, a charlatan. But then he says, "What we professional liars hope to serve is truth. I'm afraid the pompous word for that is art. Picasso himself said it. Art, he said, is a lie, a lie that makes us realize the truth." The alternative is grim. "Reality? It's the toothbrush waiting at home for you in its glass, a bus ticket, a paycheck, and the grave." ♦

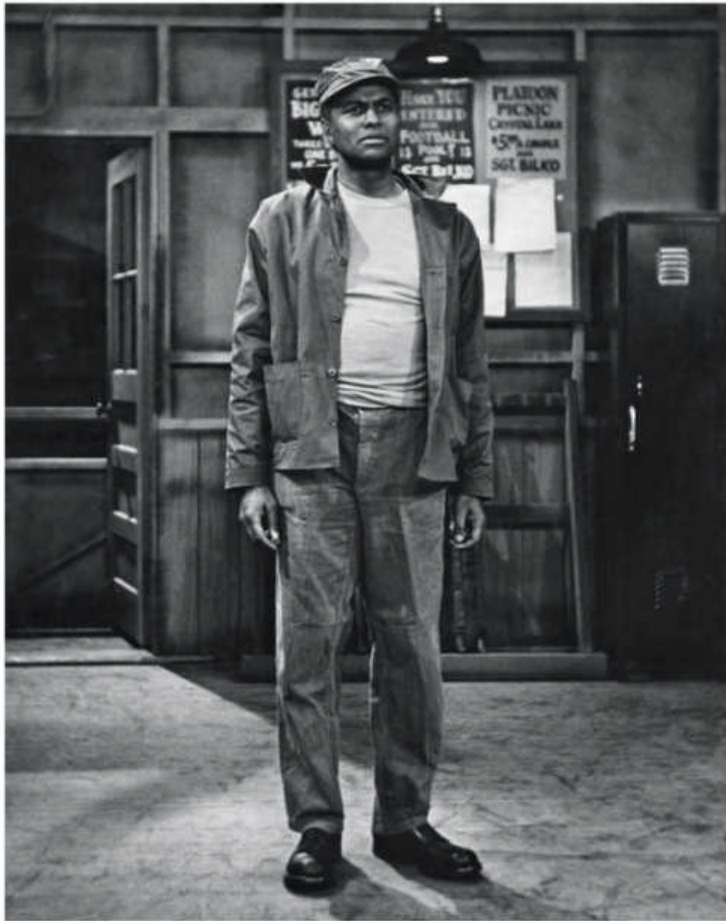


ON TELEVISION

# AMERICAN UNTOUCHABLE

*The actor who fought to integrate early TV.*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



Racial diversity on television is in a state of rapid acceleration. In 2012, when “Scandal” debuted, starring Kerry Washington as a Capitol Hill fixer, it was the first network drama to feature a black female lead in thirty-eight years—a shameful milestone. The same fall, “The Mindy Project,” on Fox, made a brown girl the madcap heroine of a sitcom, not her best friend. Just three years later, “Scandal” faces off with “Empire”; “Black-ish” and “Fresh Off the Boat” have helped rebrand ABC as “the diversity network”; Aziz Ansari’s “Master of None” struts on Netflix; the Latina-centric “Jane the Virgin” lights up the CW; and Priyanka Chopra plays the lead

on “Quantico.” There has been an especially remarkable migration of black actresses from movies to TV, among them Taraji P. Henson, Viola Davis, Angela Bassett, Gabourey Sidibe, Lorraine Toussaint, and Gabrielle Union. There is also a deluge of new talent on shows like Netflix’s “Orange Is the New Black,” one of several series that have opened the floodgates for performers who were long denied rich, complex central roles.

Hollywood, television included, is still run by white decision-makers, mostly men. The recent season of “Project Greenlight,” on HBO, made explicit how resistant to race talk Hollywood can be, a stifling culture of bros

bonding with mirror versions of themselves. Behind-the-scenes numbers have barely shifted, particularly for directors. And yet TV is evolving rapidly. Much of this is due to a prominent new set of creative figures, among them Ansari and Kaling, Shonda Rhimes and Kenya Barris, Lee Daniels and Larry Wilmore, Nahnatchka Khan and John Ridley, Dee Rees and Mara Brock Akil, who don’t merely perform but run the show. Even newer is the increasing bluntness of many creators. When Viola Davis won an Emmy for Best Actress, for ABC’s “How to Get Away with Murder,” she gave a bold and unapologetic speech in which she quoted Harriet Tubman and declared, “The only thing that separates women of color from anyone else is opportunity. You can’t win an Emmy for roles that are simply not there.”

This is thrilling and long overdue. But it’s also a phenomenon that could easily recede, as it has many times before after periods of progress: in the early fifties, when television was brand-new; in the seventies, the era of “Roots” and Norman Lear; and again in the early nineties, post-Cosby, when black sitcoms thrived. One observer understood this ephemeral quality more than most: P. Jay Sidney, an African-American actor who built a four-decade career in television, all the while protesting network racism, in what Donald Bogle’s book “Primetime Blues” recounts as a “one-man crusade to get African-Americans fair representation in television programs and commercials.” Sidney is a footnote in history books, while other activists of his era are heroes. But he was there when the medium began, appearing on TV more than any other black dramatic actor of the time. Even as his résumé grew, Sidney picketed, he wrote letters, he advocated boycotts, he taped interactions with executives, lobbying tirelessly against TV’s de-facto segregation. In 1962, he testified before the House of Representatives. Nothing made much headway; he grew disgusted and disaffected. By the time Sidney died, in Brooklyn, in 1996, he had largely been forgotten, a proud loner who never got to see his vision become reality. “People today benefit from things that were sacrificed years ago,”

*“I had a whole goddamned career of ‘Yassuh, can I git ya another drink,’” Sidney said.*

his ex-wife Carol Foster Sidney, who is now eighty-seven, told me. “And they haven’t a clue.”

Sidney was born Sidney Parhm, Jr., in 1915 in Norfolk, Virginia, and grew up in poverty, in an era of public lynchings and Jim Crow. His mother died when he was a child; his father moved the family to New York, then died when his son was fifteen. According to a 1955 profile, titled “Get P. Jay Sidney for the Part,” he was a “difficult” child who landed in foster care but excelled academically—he graduated from high school at fifteen, then went to City College for two years, dropping out to enter the theatre. A lifelong autodidact, he is described by those who knew him as a guarded, sardonic figure, eternally testing those around him against an intellectual ideal. But even during the Depression he got jobs: he was in Lena Horne’s first stage play, in 1934; in the forties, he appeared in “Carmen Jones” and “Othello.” In a photograph taken at a campaign event for Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sidney is a dapper bohemian with a clipped beard. He also built a radio career, producing a series called “Experimental Theatre of the Air,” which, in a radical move, cast voices without regard to racial categories. Sidney collected his press clippings in a binder, which is saved at the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center.

As the country came out of the Depression, and the civil-rights movement began, progress for black actors may have seemed possible. When television emerged, in the forties, it was a low-status but experimental medium, suggesting tantalizing opportunities for innovators. Yet a newspaper article from the mid-fifties, headlined “TV’S NEW POLICY FOR NEGROES,” depicts Sidney as the “single exception” to the exclusion of black dramatic actors. In TV’s infancy, the article laments, “The video floodgates were expected to be thrown open to experienced Negro actors. It never happened.”

“We took it for granted that we would be the last hired if hired at all and the first fired,” Ossie Davis recalled, in “The Box,” Jeff Kesseloff’s oral history of television. “And that we would wind up doing the same stereotypical crap that we did on Broadway.” “Amos and Andy”

was typical fare. In the late fifties, Davis participated in a TV boycott in Harlem, in which black viewers turned off their sets one Saturday night. But it was Sidney’s rabble-rousing that had a direct influence on Davis’s career: “He used to walk around with a sign, accusing the broadcast industry of discriminating against black folks. As a response to P. Jay’s accusations, CBS didn’t give him a job, but they gave me one.”

From 1951 on, Sidney made a living on TV, getting a few notable roles, including Cato, Hercules Mulligan’s slave and fellow-spy, in “The Plot to Kidnap General Washington,” in 1952. For two years, he appeared as one of two African-American soldiers on “The Phil Silvers Show”—a casting move protested by Southern stations. (The writers ignored them.) Over time, he amassed roles on more than a hundred and seventy shows, as well as a lucrative sideline in voice-over work and advertisements. (He played the onscreen role of Waxin Jackson for Ajax.) But the majority of his parts were walk-ons: doormen, porters, waiters. “I had a whole goddamned career of ‘Yassuh, can I git ya another drink, sir?’,” he told Kesseloff. “But I did what was available. I did not mix feelings with the fact that I needed money to live.”

With each setback, Sidney grew more frustrated, according to Foster Sidney, who married Sidney in 1954. Foster Sidney was the daughter of a dentist, educated at Howard University, a member of the Washington, D.C., African-American elite. She had persuaded her family to let her move to New York to be a French translator but dreamed of being an actress. Foster Sidney recalls, “He knew I had these aspirations, but he said, ‘One actor in the family.’ I, timid little thing, said, ‘Yes, dear.’” Their marriage was contentious, with Sidney resenting Foster Sidney’s “bourgeois” background; they separated, and had no children, but did not divorce until 1977. (In later years, Foster Sidney returned to acting, a period she calls “ten years in Heaven.”)

Nonetheless, Foster Sidney supported her husband’s activism, marching with him, as did a few other friends, including Sidney’s lawyer and close friend Bruce M. Wright—who later became a flamboyant activist judge, derided as

Turn ‘Em Loose Bruce for his opposition to racist bail policies. Even in freezing January, Sidney picketed CBS, the advertising agency BBDO, and other places, passing out flyers. He bought ads in the *Times* advocating a boycott against the sponsor Lever Brothers, which used black talent only in ads aimed at blacks. “It was his *life*,” Foster Sidney said. “There was nothing else he wanted.”

Sidney was particularly impatient with actors who hesitated to join his protests for fear of alienating their employers. “I didn’t give a shit about jobs for blacks,” he told Kesseloff. “I was concerned about the image of black people in television.” As early as 1954, he was writing to the *Footlights and Sidelights* column in the *Amsterdam News*, encouraging a write-in campaign, noting that “by not including Negroes in at least approximately the numbers and the roles in which they occur in American life, television and radio programs that purport to give a true picture of American life malign and misrepresent Negro citizens as a whole.”

In 1962, he testified before the House, arguing against “discrimination that is almost all-pervading, that is calculated and continuing.” He described two-faced producers, who used a nepotistic, friend-of-a-friend hiring approach, saying, “for most white people, Negroes are not actors, or doctors, or lawyers—not really—but are rather, all members of a secret lodge, domiciled in Harlem or some other Colored Town—all knowing each other and all experts on one another.” In 1967, *Variety* reported that Sidney had quit a job on “As the World Turns,” protesting the soap opera’s policy of not offering black actors contracts, as it did white actors. In 1968, he was quoted in the *Times* on whether the representation of black people in ads had improved. “It was like a man who’s been gravely ill with a temperature of 104 if it drops to 102 it’s better,” he said. “But, if the question is, ‘Has the progress been commensurate with the need?’ The answer is ‘No.’”

He also picketed David Susskind. A producer and talk-show host, Susskind was a famous liberal, but when he produced a show about American history that omitted blacks Sidney targeted his office. After Susskind died, Claude Lewis recounted Sidney’s confrontation with Susskind in the



Philadelphia *Inquirer*. “You’re killing me,” Susskind said. “I mean to,” Sidney replied. “You talk that good stuff on TV, but you don’t practice what you preach. We’re here to say you’re a phony. If you really want to be the decent guy you pretend to be, you’ll offer opportunities to talented Negro performers, just as you do to whites.” When Susskind told Sidney that he would “earn an ulcer,” Sidney replied, “Mr. Susskind, I don’t get ulcers. I give ulcers. I’m on this line, not to win parts for me, but for others who deserve them.” A few years later, he appeared in a Susskind production, the gritty and iconoclastic social-justice procedural “East Side/West Side,” along with James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson. The series was cancelled after one season.

Tom Scott, a younger actor and a model—he was one of the first African-Americans to be hired by Ford—picketed with Sidney. The two men talked nightly, strategizing; Scott was inspired by his friend’s savvy. When he couldn’t get press coverage, Scott recalls, Sidney had a female friend call the police and tell them, “There’s a nigger out there with a knife!” The cops showed up—and, with them, the media.

Yet, as the years passed, the door stayed locked. TV was still run by white people, emphasizing white stories. Sidney had bought a brick house in the Prospect Lefferts Gardens neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he retreated. In 1988, the *Amsterdam News* lamented the minuscule presence of black TV producers and writers, adding that Sidney’s activism had had as much effect as “ice cubes at the South Pole.” Sidney made one last significant TV appearance, in the TV movie “A Gathering of Old Men.” But in some ways little had changed: in his final movie, “A Kiss Before Dying,” in 1991, he played a bellman.

Foster Sidney lost touch with her ex-husband after their divorce; so did Scott and Lewis. But someone must have known him—the person who saved a document, labelled “ephemera,” that showed up at the Schomburg Center. On the envelope is scrawled “P. Jay Sidney memoir.” Inside is a fifteen-page handwritten account of Sidney’s life, on lined yellow paper, ending with a description of his death, from prostate cancer. It’s un-

clear who the author is, but the narrative is a raw and intimate confession, seemingly notes for a book. It’s possible that this is the project Sidney mentioned in a 1946 playbill, in a bio that describes him writing a book whose title is underlined at the top of these pages, “Memoirs of an American Untouchable.”

Written in the third person, the document swings wildly in tone; it’s laceratingly self-critical at some points, grandiose at others. It recounts Sidney’s father’s warnings: never to trust white people or women, never to be dependent. It ruminates on the cruel tumult of Sidney’s romantic life, but also on his longing, never-fulfilled, for an intellectual soul mate. He rails against institutions: the Catholic Church, Hollywood, even the civil-rights movement, which he felt made black people complacent. To the end, the document says, Sidney was rankled by a world that thought small. He had picketed for “black actors to be portrayed as respected people,” but an award he won honored only “his fighting to get black actors work on TV—just work, any old part. (This was not his aim at all! No one understood. He became very discouraged.)”

By all accounts, Sidney grew irascible with age: Lewis describes him as having become so sensitive that he saw slights everywhere. But there was a moment when Sidney believed that TV might someday reflect African-Americans in their full humanity. In a speech Sidney gave at a National Freedom Day dinner, in Philadelphia in 1968, he laid out this vision, with wit and elegance. The “bad image” of blackness, he said, was “like the air we breathe, and that makes it harder to recognize.” While African-Americans were accepted as “entertainers” for whites, only on dramatic shows might they be seen as “real people with real problems and real feelings.” White-centered programs “imply, insinuate, suggest—and I will use this word in the special way that possibly only Negroes will understand—they signify” that African-Americans were not truly citizens. Black audiences absorbed this message, too, learning to discount their own power—their economic leverage, especially. Sidney’s speech urged viewers to demand their place onscreen. Read today, it feels like a map to a world always just beyond the horizon. ♦

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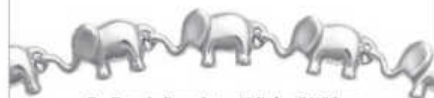
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## TOIL AND TROUBLE

*"Macbeth" and "Youth."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

*Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard in a film directed by Justin Kurzel.*

A famous essay of 1933, by the critic L. C. Knights, bears a provoking title: "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" Within the essay, Knights never bothers to answer the question, because his purpose is to mock it. In his eyes, it stands for all the dumb and fruitless inquiries that are set in train by Shakespearean scholars who see the plays as, in essence, studies of character—a hopelessly dry and reductive view, for Knights, who reads each play as one long dramatic poem, welling over with tides of symbolic language. He's right, to a degree, but here's the thing: the question is a good one. After all, "Macbeth" has much to say about patrilineage, and the handing down of power; there's no point in grabbing a crown, however brutally, if it gets plucked away within a generation. We know that Lady Macbeth had at least one child ("I have given suck," she says), so where is it now?

An answer is provided by a new film of "Macbeth," directed by Justin Kurzel, which begins with a startling sight: a dead child, laid in heather, with stones placed over the eyes. Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) is the grieving father, and a

funeral pyre is lit. Yet, still, goaded first by the witches' prophecy, and then by his wife (Marion Cotillard), he pursues his deviant course: slaying Duncan (David Thewlis) and ordering the assassination of Banquo (Paddy Considine), whose son Fleance (Lochlann Harris) escapes the sword, thus keeping alive the witches' galling prediction that it is Banquo, not Macbeth, who will spawn a royal line. Again, children lie at the heart of the matter, and any film or staging of the tale should listen out for those nursery rhythms and rhymes, redolent of the seesaw and the rocking horse, that hold such frightening sway: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair"; "Open locks, whoever knocks"; "The Thane of Fife had a wife."

Kurzel is Australian, and his previous feature, "Snowtown," was set in the suburbs of Adelaide. Now he has swapped hemispheres, for the real snows of Scotland, and although the new film is not as biting violent as the last, it is an assault course for the senses. It begins and ends with combat, and everything in between feels like a pause for breath, for murmured incantations, and for the licking of wounds. Even the interludes of

peace, or of sociability, bear traces of a savage hour. The astonishing makeup that adorns Lady Macbeth, for example, once she is made queen—a wrap-around band of sky blue, not just on her eyelids but right across her face—is a horizontal echo of the three downward stripes, daubed in black earth, that marked her husband's features at the start. In short, she wears warpaint of her own. Fair is a match for foul.

Would that such a balance were maintained elsewhere. Foulness, for the most part, wins the day, and thus the beautiful paeon, by Duncan and Banquo, to the home of the Macbeths—"a pleasant seat," where "the air is delicate"—is expunged. The problem is not that Kurzel cuts the words, which is his absolute right, but that he destroys the conditions from which they might conceivably have sprung. We need *some* reminder, however fleeting, that there was a time when the natural order prevailed. No such luck. There is not a wisp of delicacy here, and no castle, either, merely a gaggle of tents, pitched like nomads' dwellings in a bare land. You want to ask, "Is it worth killing, and inviting damnation, just for the chance to rule this wilderness?" Later, we see a cathedral, with a lofty nave, but its grandeur seems implausible. More typical is the wooden church, little more than a hut, where Lady Macbeth unburdens herself while sleepwalking, as though making her confession. The weirdness of all this is compounded by Cotillard, playing a foreigner in a strange land, who appears to be dreaming, eyes wide open, not just here but throughout the span of the movie. Kurzel is weaving a nightmare, and nothing is permitted, in the heroine's phrase, to peep through the blanket of the dark.

You cannot fault the nerve of the director. In filming "Macbeth," he is following Polanski, in 1971; Welles, in 1948; and Kurosawa, whose 1957 version, "Throne of Blood," shifts the action to medieval Japan. (We get a nod to it, I think, in the costumes of the latest movie. Check out the woollen robe that Duncan sports, belted and crossed over at the front.) Doubtless, L. C. Knights would have shuddered at the liberties taken by these films, yet they fulfill the brief that he proposed. You would not turn to them, as you might to a theatrical production,



for a fresh interpretation of the characters. Instead, the human figures, especially in Welles and Kurosawa, melt into the hell brew of the atmosphere like ingredients in the witches' cauldron. Indeed, Welles's opening shot pulls us *into* the cauldron, down to bubble level, to see what is forged in the clayey gruel: an image of such primitive horror, like a creation myth gone bad, that it makes Kurzel's prelude, set on a battlefield and glutinous with gore, seem a touch ordinary by contrast.

Nonetheless, that sequence is framed and timed—quick swipes and stabs of weaponry, plus a dogged slow motion—with gruesome skill, and it serves as a helpful introduction to the brand of hero that Kurzel and Fassbender have in store. When you think of Fassbender, and of his rise in recent years, you picture an action man—smearing his cell walls, in “Hunger” (2008), sating his galloping lusts, in “Shame” (2011), or meting out a fevered flogging, in “12 Years a Slave” (2013). He is not, primarily, a man of words, and you get the feeling, in “Macbeth,” that they have to be dragged unwillingly from his mouth. Death scares him less than declamation. In fact, the whole company of actors seems embarrassed by—or warned against—anything that smacks of rhetorical esprit, and anyone watching the movie, but not knowing the play, might have no idea that it was written in verse. Any glint of lyrical wealth would have spoiled the impoverished mood: such, at least, is Kurzel's calculation, and you can hear the ghost of Orson Welles, a zealot of the orotund, chuckling richly at such a drab conceit.

Hence the odd sensation as the new film nears its end. By this stage, the world that Shakespeare reveals is an exhausted one, drained to the lees, yet Kurzel is braced by the prospect of a final fight. He takes his cue not from “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,” uttered in an unmemorable drone, but from a far more spirited cry—“At least we'll die with harness on our back.” Soon, the screen becomes, as Macbeth would say, incarnadine: entirely steeped in red, as if blood had leaked into the lens. Ingmar Bergman, in “Cries and Whispers,” employed the same device. “When I was a child, I imagined the soul to be a dragon,” he later wrote, adding, “Inside the dragon, everything was red.” He was dealing with sickness rather than mortal wounds, but that scorching sense of the dragonish burns into Kurzel's “Macbeth.” His finest inspiration is to set light to Birnam Wood, so that when it comes to Dunsinane, as foreseen by the witches, it doesn't rustle through the fog, as it did for Kurosawa. It flames. And what is the last thing we witness? Not Macbeth but, as at the outset, a child: young Fleance, running into the redness, toward a future of yet more slash and burn. It's in the blood.

The place is a European spa. The hero is a creative artist who finds himself unwilling or unable to create. There have been many women in his life, and, at one point, they all show up, calling out and crowding his imagination. Remind you of anything? Well, that was the story of Fellini's “8 1/2,” and now it is the story of “Youth,” the

new film from Paolo Sorrentino, whose previous work, “The Great Beauty,” sauntered in the footsteps of “La Dolce Vita.” How should we view such flagrant homage—as a show of humility, or of arrogance?

The artist in this instance is a composer, Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine), who is taking the air at a Swiss retreat. There he is visited by an obsequious pest from Buckingham Palace, no less, who bears a request from the Queen: would Ballinger conduct his most celebrated work at a special concert—and, in the process, rise to become Sir Fred? Ballinger is content, however, to hang out with his friend Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel), a film director, who is stuck on his latest project, and whose son (Ed Stoppard) is married to Ballinger's daughter (Rachel Weisz). Also present is Miss Universe (Madalina Diana Ghenea), who bathes naked in front of the old guys, indifferent to their flaccid gaze, and a movie star (Paul Dano), who feels in peril, poor lamb, of being typecast by success. The movie is gorgeous, as you would expect from Sorrentino, but beauty this great can lead to suffocation. The plot goes round and round and nowhere, and the highlight is a couple of blistering monologues—one from Weisz, delivered while she is cloaked in mud, and another from Jane Fonda, as an aging screen goddess, encased in her own crust of powder and Botox. The men in this film make a fetish of their blockage. The women want to break free. ♦

#### NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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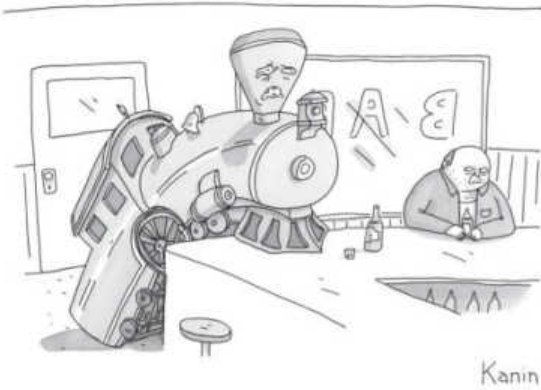
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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Liam Francis Walsh, must be received by Sunday, December 6th. The finalists in the November 23rd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 21st & 28th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"She left me for an engine that could."*  
Alexander Toth, Boston, Mass.



### THE FINALISTS

*"Your boss just called. He is sending something to you from the Cloud."*

Douglas Andersen, Lexington, Ky.

*"One drop of rain won't kill you."*

Jessica S. Franzini, St. Augustine, Fla.

*"They said the showers would be isolated."*

Jack Zafran, Granada Hills, Calif.

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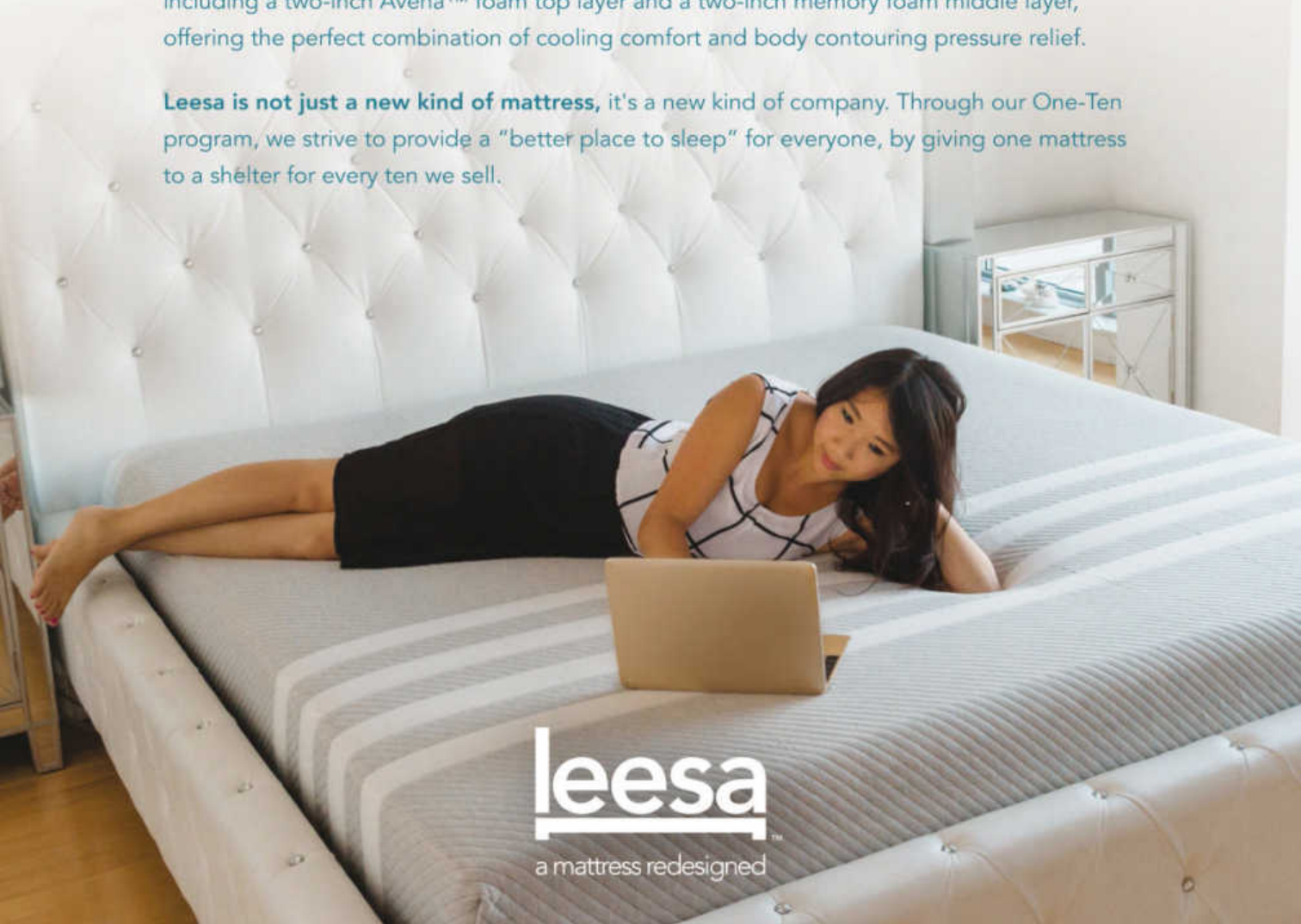
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